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DO WE BELIEVE ?

A RECORD  
OF A GREAT CORRESPONDENCE





# DO WE BELIEVE?

A RECORD OF A GREAT CORRESPONDENCE  
IN "THE DAILY TELEGRAPH,"  
OCTOBER, NOVEMBER, DECEMBER, 1904

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
W. L. COURTNEY  
M.A., LL.D.

SEVENTH THOUSAND

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*The correspondence on "Do We Believe?" was started by a letter ("Oxoniensis") which appeared in "The Daily Telegraph" on September 29, 1904. It ran for three months, ending on December 31, 1904. The total number of letters received—of which only a selection appears in the following pages—amounted to at least nine thousand; and if all the letters and sermons had been printed, they would have occupied two thousand five hundred columns of the newspaper.*



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## INTRODUCTION

IN our modern democracy, as every one knows, the newspapers fulfil a function of increasing importance which was before distributed amongst various agents and disciplines. The Press has become the great instructor of the time, not only in political matters, where indeed its influence has long since been felt, but in all those different elements which enter into the idea and contents of modern public opinion. It would be an interesting but also a most difficult task to attempt to discover how much of the average thought of our age comes directly from the newspapers. Educational matters, historical themes, scientific problems, literary questions, artistic ideals, grave religious doubts, articles of our faith—these are the things which nowadays men gather to a large extent unconsciously from the widespread sheets which not only reveal a picture of each day as it comes, but are always suggesting principles of criticism and guidance in various spheres of effort. And yet it would be equally true to say that the Newspaper Press does not so much lead the way as follow the trend of popular opinion. What the man in the street is saying is reproduced in the newspaper ; what the sense of the community will establish in the course of twenty-four hours will be found enshrined in those columns which come every morning hot from the Press. It has also to be remarked that

journals represent in a sense "the conscience" of the public—the background of dim hopes and aspirations, thoughts, emotions, sympathies, and aversions which enter into our quotidian life. When *The Daily Telegraph* commenced a discussion on the important subject, "Do we Believe?" it not only registered the more or less floating ideas current on matters of faith, but it also served as a modern substitute for the confessional. Day after day men and women confided to the columns of *The Daily Telegraph* their most intimate perplexities and doubts. Clearly it was a satisfaction for them to do so; it gave them opportunities for which they had been long anxious, and the convenient veil of anonymity neutralised any feeling of shame or shyness in the extent and nature of their self-revelation. All of which proves that a newspaper may sometimes anticipate the wants of the public, it being part of the duty of a modern editor not only to register events as they occur, but, in virtue of a quick intuition, to forestall the conscious or semi-conscious needs of those to whose intellectual and moral wants he ministers. Probably nothing quite like the correspondence on "Do we Believe?" has ever before appeared in the public Press.

Hence the letters which will be found in the body of this volume present a curiously interesting psychological study, and also an almost pathetic picture of moral and spiritual aspirations. Possibly no one was aware how deeply average men and women were feeling the necessity for a faith that should be beyond the reach of sceptical doubt. It is a trite and commonplace remark that the age is a sceptical one—a prey to scepticism due to a variety of causes, most of all, perhaps, to the triumphant analysis of Science applied both to History and Biology. When we learn the



natural history of a thing we begin to wonder whether it is of the same value as it seemed to be before this account of its origin and development was made known. "What a piece of work is a man!" says Hamlet. "How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god!" And yet, when we study "the hole of the pit whence we were digged," when Science enables us to see that a long process of tentative efforts was made by Nature before man was realised, this kinship between the "paragon of animals" and the lowest and most rudimentary structures seems to deprive the last term of the ascending evolution of all dignity and respect. A man whose father was the ape, and whose remote ancestor was the worm, appears to have lost his position just because he is shown to be like the beasts that perish. In precisely similar fashion, when we study the history of Religion and discover how much that we thought peculiar to Christianity is not only to be found in more antique faiths, but is also due to certain antecedent conditions and influences of racial development, the unique sacredness of the faith once delivered to the saints seems to have disappeared. Nor do we get more satisfaction from an analysis of our morality, which reduces it to vulgar calculations of expediency; nor from a similar process applied to abstract and metaphysical thought, resolving it into aggregations of material atoms and molecules. This is the way in which scepticism has grown and flourished in our times. Our world is only a speck in space; our humanity is only the last point in an ascending series from a bit of protoplasm; our soul, if Science will allow us to have one at all, is only a form of energy which in another way belongs to every particle of matter. Yet, side by side with all these dis-

integrating effects of Science, certain traits and elements of humanity betray a plain revolt from the conclusions which seem so logically ordained. The age may be a sceptical one, but at no other time more than our own have all kinds and species of superstition and mysticism flourished. Psychical research leads some of its most ardent prophets to think that they have discovered a real proof of the immortality of the soul. The crasser forms of spiritualism, despite their foolish vulgarity, indicate a certain unconquered belief in an ethereal world of spirits. Faith-healing, Christian Belief, Esoteric Buddhism, and other fashions more or less transitory, bear witness to that vague, but resolute, tendency of the human mind to find some consolation outside the material conditions of existence. Let a man dispassionately read some of the letters included in the present correspondence, and he will find, it may be with some surprise, that people are not so sceptical as he supposed. On the contrary, Science may have won its victories in an intellectual sphere, but the human heart is not satisfied with deductions which seem to leave it without any satisfaction for its intimate and half-avowed tendencies. Dogmatic Christianity may indeed have decayed, but those instincts to which, as a form of religion, it has always appealed are as fresh and as indomitable as ever.

It is perhaps to inquire too curiously if we attempt to discover in how many different ways men construe to themselves the necessity of a faith. Abundant examples will be found in the letters which follow. One of the striking things about this correspondence is that it comes principally from men, and not from women, while another remarkable feature is the great preponderance of belief over unbelief. When England became Protestant and shook off the yoke of Roman Catholicism, the invitation was at once

given to her people to find out for themselves the reasons for their faith. The great autocratic discipline of the Roman communion peremptorily laid down certain doctrines which were necessary for salvation. It treated humanity as a collection of babes and sucklings, who must be plainly told what to accept and what to reject. Protestantism reveals a wholly different spirit. It belongs to that same temper of individualism which has done so much for the industrial prosperity of our country. A man must learn to be independent and work out his own salvation not only materially, but spiritually. The Bible is open for every one to read ; no man need accept any doctrine unless it recommends itself to him in the privacy of his own conscience. That is a great and inspiring ideal, admirably appropriate to the evolution of a democracy where every man shall count as one, and no man for more than one. But it has also this result, that there can no longer be any uniformity in belief. Just as we differ from one another in our aptitudes, tendencies, characters, so will each of us construe for himself the meaning and value of the doctrines in which he believes. Moreover, the reasons which one man will assign for his faith are by no means the same as those which another man will bring forward.

If we take the letters in this volume seriatim, we shall find every kind of reason advanced for a creed. A few will quote the authority of the Scriptures ; others, thinking that that authority has been seriously undermined—on the lines, for instance, suggested by the Dean of Westminster in recent lectures—will cast about for other foundations. Faith is not a thing which comes by reason ; it is a matter of intuition. I believe because I must, because certain faiths are part of the original furniture of my mind. That

is one view. Or else, I believe because I desire consolation ; I want something to help me through the difficulties of life, and especially to lessen for me the terrors of death. That is another standpoint. Or there is a third attitude : I may have seriously made up my mind that belief is an act of submission, it being part of the duty incumbent on me to accept doctrines which have been passed down the ages as the sovereign principles whereby a man shall regulate his existence. Or, again, I may believe because I have discovered that some form of belief is absolutely necessary for moral conduct ; or because without it the sweet influences of prayer would be nugatory ; or because, in my intense yearning to find in another world the faces of those whom I have loved and lost, I hold tightly to any form of creed which promises me immortality. Or, lastly, I may apply Rationalism to Christianity, and, giving up some of the doctrines which are obviously out of harmony with scientific thought, retain such elements as can be argumentatively maintained by logic and ratiocination. Instances of all these diverse frames of mind will be found in the ensuing correspondence, and that is why these letters are so interesting. They give one a panorama of existing forms of faith—a picture of the religious world as it is found in a Christian commonwealth which does not take its religion from the mouths of despotic priests, but constructs its varying features according to the principles of Protestant individualism.

Such a state of affairs will be very differently estimated according to the standpoint we adopt. A man trained in Science, accustomed, that is to say, to argue from ascertained principles, or else to accept conclusions based on an accurate induction, will be apt to speak somewhat disdainfully of the masses of shifting, and not always



consistent, opinions and beliefs which make up the creed of the ordinary man. So, too, I should imagine, an earnest priest, with something in him of the assured and intolerant spirit of the Roman Catholic priesthood, will look with genuine sorrow at the picture of a religious world given over, as he would say, to chaos. A creed depends upon dogmas, he would be inclined to assert, and can hardly exist in the absence of dogmatic foundations. But in England it is precisely these dogmatic foundations which are most keenly debated. Perhaps it would be even true to say that the form of Christianity which is most common in our day does not repose upon dogmas at all. And from an ecclesiastical standpoint such a state of affairs is and must be absurd. It does not follow, however, that the religious life of a community, even granting all the ambiguous and puzzling conditions of the time, is either weak or absurd. For a nation that regards "to do something," as its supreme duty in the world, religion must always be construed as a principle of action. Theoretical principles are for speculative people; practical men only require such accepted starting-points as supply practical and reasonable motives for energy. A hard, definite, logical, and systematic religious faith is almost an impossibility in the England we know and at the opening of the twentieth century; but all the best men recognise that there is a certain virtue about Christian maxims of action—that it is right to be kind and philanthropic, that it is one's duty to help one's fellows, that the supreme task of man in the course of his threescore years and ten is to leave the world better in some respects than he found it. These are vague principles, but they are not ineffective, and they undoubtedly serve for a large proportion of our countrymen, who would be very much insulted if they were told that they were not Christians.

To this must be added some emotional traits derived from many sources. The religious instinct has never failed in this country, nor, indeed, as far as we are able to observe humanity, has there ever been a lack of those rudimentary beliefs in the existence of a spiritual world which are the cradle, so to speak, of all religions. The religious instinct has clothed itself in strange forms. Sometimes it is Fetichism, or a fear of ghosts, or a worship of dead ancestors; at a higher stage it is a belief in the Divine government of the world—Polytheism or Monotheism. But the comparative study of religions, which has shocked some minds by the suggestion that what they thought peculiar to their own faith is found in many other religious creeds, is in reality the greatest proof that can possibly be advanced that, whatever else humanity can get rid of, it can never get rid of its religious instinct. Thus it comes that even in the present day there is a much more extensive religious feeling than hasty observers, whether scientific or historic, are inclined to admit. If we analyse it we shall find that it is essentially sentimental or emotional, but it has all the wider empire for this very reason. Try the hardest-headed man of your acquaintance, and you will find that there are some points on which his logic and his reason entirely disappear and he is governed by sentimental and emotional considerations alone. It is a common experience, which any one can discover for himself. Reason, as Madame de Montespan remarked, is, after all, only for reasonable people. The majority of us are not reasonable through and through. We cultivate a little garden away from the spying eyes of mankind, in which we build our altars and perform in secret our sacrifices to our own gods.

For instance, there is a very remarkable little book, which has recently appeared, called "The Diary of a

Church-Goer.”<sup>1</sup> The author, who prefers to remain anonymous, is, I should think from internal evidence, a man well versed in the law. He is obviously well read, has a clear and logical intellect, and I have no doubt in all the practical matters of life is as hard-headed and as full of common sense as any one could desire. For this very reason his reflections as a Church-goer are extremely significant, because they throw light on the average mental state of men of light and leading at the opening of the twentieth century. He has many criticisms to pass on the conduct of religious services, the character of the sermons to which he listens, and the substance of the lessons read by the officiating priest. He does not like a great many of the chapters of the Old Testament which are appointed to be read in the churches. He is made uneasy by the “cursing” psalms; he cannot away with the Athanasian Creed. He thinks it a pity that a man should be bound in virtue of his religious orders to defend the knavery of Jacob in extracting the blessing of his father. He questions the moral validity of some of the parables which he finds in the New Testament. Above all, he seriously sets himself to a deliberate inquiry as to the exact views of the Divinity of Christ which men in his circumstances ought to entertain. All these things betoken a careful inquirer—precisely the sort of man whom the clergy should welcome in their churches—a student of open mind, who does not divest himself of that ordinary apparatus of logical and reasoned thought by means of which he conducts his mundane affairs as soon as he finds himself in the pew and listens to things which old habit and childish wont have made familiar to him. There is not the slightest doubt that a book like “The Diary of a Church-Goer” indicates many of those points

<sup>1</sup> “The Diary of a Church-Goer” (Macmillan & Co., 1904)



which the developing culture of our time has signalised as requiring attention and reform from all who desire a continuance of religious worship in our land. Each generation has to rethink old problems for itself, and the solutions which sufficed for the preceding age are as a rule unsatisfactory for the age which succeeds. What most thinking men desire is that the better lessons of History and of Science should be applied to the conduct of religious service in churches. But what especially concerns me is the evidence which a book like "The Diary of a Church-Goer" affords of the extraordinary strength of the religious instinct. There come times in our history when an outburst of intolerant rationalism seems to have uprooted the very foundations, not only of the Christian creed, but of all creeds. Probably some of the enlightened thinkers in the eighteenth century supposed that they had destroyed for ever the pretensions of the Church. We now know that they did nothing of the kind. Even if the defenders of the ecclesiastical position are rash, unwise, or perhaps insufficiently educated, the great fortress which they defend is still inexpugnable. Here is the author of "The Diary of a Church-Goer," who discusses with the greatest freedom some of the most august mysteries of our faith. He does not believe in the inspiration of the Bible ; he cannot discover in the Gospels, or even in St. Paul, any indubitable references to the miraculous birth of Christ ; nor yet does he conceal his own view that the Founder of our religion was, though plenarily inspired, nevertheless a God-inspired *man*. From the official religious view the author of this book must be regarded as a Sceptic, or an Agnostic. But now listen to the following passage. He is speaking of the effect upon his mind of the Gospel story :—

"The story is quite familiar to us. We supply the

sentences beforehand as the reader proceeds. Yet it has happened—one knows not how—it will doubtless happen again—one cannot tell when—that, as the verses follow one another, suddenly out of the well-known story there comes a strange, thrilling sense of heights and depths never before scaled or plumbed. Something in the air, something in ourselves, something, it may be, in the voice of the reader, in sunny mornings, in country churches, when the scents and sounds of summer come through open windows, in the equable atmosphere of some vast minster, when the words spoken at the lectern are encompassed with stillness—under all varying circumstances, defying calculation and explanation—the new comes out of the old, the passion out of the commonplace, and we say within ourselves, ‘This thing is of God.’ ”

Could there be a more eloquent example that within the enlightened mind of the best of our contemporaries there exist fervent feelings of emotion and faith, a simple, reverent attitude toward mysteries accepted, though in some respects uncomprehended, the very spirit and nerve of a truly religious faith?

The pity of it is that in our modern world so much of this groundwork of feeling and religious instinct remains vague, chaotic, ill-defined, because unanalysed and unconnected with permanent elements of human psychology and human life. Books of evidence which appealed to our forefathers have very little importance for us. Apologies, analogies, explanations, illustrations which have been rife in past ages are for the most part dead—dead “as the snows of yester year.” To take only one example: “Natural Religion,” the religion which, without doubt, meant a great deal for men like Bishop Butler, has lost its message for us, with our wider knowledge of all

that Science has told us about the world and the Cosmos of things. An "Analogy" such as Bishop Butler wrote is quite unpersuasive. Proofs of design, such as those which made Paley famous, strike us as wanting in the first principles of logical value. Nature is only a great storehouse of phenomena, each depending on the other, proceeding according to rigid and unalterable laws, and exhibiting no traces of tenderness, or mercy, or loving-kindness. Paley's argument from design is especially fallacious. You say that everything is obviously formed for some end ; you say that everything exhibits marks of adaptation ; therefore there must be an adapter, a designer ; the watch shows evidence of design, therefore there must be a watchmaker. This is a very confusing and very inadequate argument from analogy. For what does the watchmaker do ? He has to take certain materials which, observe, he does not create, and adapt them to a particular end which he has in view. Can we, however, for a moment suppose that the Divine Author of existence takes materials which He does not create, and forces them to correspond to His own views ? The analogy of the human artificer clearly fails altogether when applied to the Divine. To God the materials are not given, but He is supposed to make them. Is it not an absurd idea that He should first make materials which do not correspond to His purposes, in order that afterwards, by skilful contrivances and adaptation, He might force them to answer His purposes ? And so we are apparently driven from lower ideas to higher, from inadequate and confusing analogies to a broader and deeper philosophy. Perhaps it is not in the world as such that we have to look for the true evidence of God's existence. If from any other source we could get the assurance of which we stand in need, then, surveying the panorama of existence,

we might read deeper meanings in what is enacted before our eyes. But if we had only the natural world to deal with, it is at least a question whether any answer satisfactory alike to our intelligence and our faith could ever be obtained. "Say not," said Christ, "Lo here, or Lo there, for the kingdom of God is within you." Or, to put the same idea into philosophic language, it is on the basis of man's own nature and the secrets of his own personality that the solution of our problem depends. If we were not thinking creatures, and above all acting creatures, we should be without any key to unlock the mystery of the Universe.

Let me attempt, in however rough a fashion, to develop this last point. What we desire to find is some basis of logical and reasonable thought, some foundation which appeals to our intelligence, on which we can subsequently rear those structures of emotion and faith which apparently the human being has required through all the ages of his conscious life. At the present moment most men are keeping in separate pigeon-holes, as it were, what they want to satisfy their religious instincts, and what they want to satisfy their intelligence and their reason. It must be an absolutely unhealthy state of things which admits of any such severance. It is the same man, after all, who thinks in his study or applies his reasoning powers for the conduct of practical matters, and who, then, on Sundays puts on his tall hat and frock-coat and goes to church. Yet to all intents and purposes the average man, as we know him and see him every day, is two beings and not one. Possibly he accepts passively all that inherited traditions have taught him to think about Religion, while, on the contrary, on every day of the week except Sunday he pursues his business in a spirit of active enterprise, absolutely at the



opposite pole to his Sabbatarian lethargy. Now, if the ordinary man of intelligence of the present day could be induced for once to apply an equal amount of thought to his religious life, he might or might not become a believer in the recognised acceptance of the term; but in a deeper and truer sense he would become a much more simple, direct, and honest man, just in proportion to his improved self-consistency. Nothing can be conceived worse than the sort of compromise to which the man in the street resigns himself. It is demoralising alike to his practical industry and to what he calls his faith. And it gives a wrong impression of the general religious life of the community.

Now, how can we justify to ourselves what we have called the perennial religious instincts of humanity? In essence, these instincts involve the recognition of something not ourselves which is necessary to the completion both of what we are and desire to be; the admission that the tangible, material life is not all; that out of the world in which our lot is cast there springs in us all an indomitable aspiration, hope, prayer, to a spirit, or power, or energy holding together the framework of things. How can such innate feelings be rationalised? What is the explanation? Can we in any way prove that from the basis of what we know we are inevitably impelled to what we surmise and feel? I take it that we can, and that such a process depends on a just recognition of what the human personality is. Man is a thinking being, man is also an active being. I am forced, however, to pass over all that is involved in the first proposition—that man is a thinking being—because it is mixed up with and depends upon certain trains of metaphysical reasoning hardly appropriate

to this discussion. Even on this ground it can be maintained, as indeed in the history of human thought it often has been maintained, that the analysis of the human consciousness gradually leads us to an universal consciousness, and that knowledge itself is inexplicable except on the ground of an universal spirit revealing itself with ever-increasing distinctness to the thought and consciousness of man. This universal spirit, which holds, as it were, in its clasped hands all that is progressively revealed in the history of human intelligence, is, phrase it as we may, nothing else but God.

But the other aspect of humanity is far easier to deal with and equally effective for my purpose. Man is not only a thinking being, but he is in especial and above all an acting being. How does this conception assist us? Observe that as soon as the slow progress of evolution has developed mankind, it has produced something which in a real sense stands above and controls such natural laws as the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. Man can actually influence the course of development, can rearrange the conditions of existence in which he is born. Is that fact doubted? Consider, then, how mankind has lessened the effects and softened the incidence of that cruel law, the survival of the fittest. If left alone it would imperatively decree the destruction and passing away of all those who are, for whatever reason, unfitted to bear the toil and burden of the day; the sick ones, the weakly ones, would all die: only the strong and self-reliant would survive. But what does man do? He builds hospitals for the sick, he secures, by a division of labour, that while the strong must act the weak should think. How unfortunate it would have been

for the human race if men and women, merely because they possessed a defective physical organisation, should have been wiped off the face of the world! Ill-health is often conjoined with rare intellectual attributes; physical deformity even has over and over again been united with a singularly powerful brain. That is man's discovery, and he positively interferes with the action of the law of the survival of the fittest because he chooses to interpret these words, "the fittest," in his own way, not as synonymous with brute strength or even with versatility of endowment, but as including any and every quality which can from any point of view be regarded as helpful to man's estate. He will not let the weak go to the wall, because the weak are sometimes endowed with a spiritual or a mental power calculated to subserve the real interests of the race.

Well, then, man is an active being ; man can re-act on the natural laws and modify their influence ; and he does this because he is incarnated energy. And this supplies him with a new point of view from which to interpret the world. From the purely intellectual standpoint nature seems an endless progression of effects ; but, looking into the secret of his own organisation, man finds that change is due to an energy which he knows to be personal, or, if we like to put it in that way, that Will is the very type of causation. If he applies this to nature at large—if he interprets such scientific terms as force and energy in the only sense in which they have any meaning for him, as the exercise of will—who shall blame him? And if from the endless procession of effects he looks back to the real archetypal cause, what is to prevent him from this interpretation? Is it a fear of anthropomorphism—a blessed and mysterious word like Mesopotamia? But anthropo-



morphism is, after all, an effete bogey. We cannot jump off our own shadow, we cannot help thinking in terms of human faculty. If we are right in assuming that in man's own nature is to be found the highest type of natural product, if in any true and real sense Christ's words can be applied, "The kingdom of God is within you," then I do not think that man will fear to trust the indications which he finds within himself of the highest type of all natural activity, and to look from the panorama of the world's change to its Divine cause, or God.

But we must carry on the line of argument to other and equally important issues. If man is, in any true sense of the word, a centre of force, if he is not only a thinking creature but also an acting creature, the meaning of his action, the end of his action, are points of sovereign importance in any consideration of his nature or destiny. Just because it is his mission in the world to act, he is no longer one of those dimly conscious creations of nature which hardly emerge from the material embodiment in which they are found ; he cannot be only dimly conscious, he is self-conscious ; intelligence has revealed to him some of the secrets of the world in which he finds himself. Intelligence has equally revealed to him the enormous responsibility which waits upon his volitional power as its shadow, which gives him, indeed, the power to influence the course of the world's history, but lays upon him besides the almost intolerable burden of a duty to fulfil, a conscience to obey, a moral order to execute. It is thus that we are inevitably led out of the conditions of knowledge into the conditions of morality. If we are asked how best to describe man, whether by his range of thought or by the range of his volitional activities, there can be no doubt or hesitation about the reply ; man is indeed a thinking creature, but the thought is a means to

action. And perhaps this accounts for that natural feeling, I will not say of mistrust, but of something which indicates a real want of sympathy, with which we regard the mere recluse, the mere student, the intellectual monk. I do not desire to argue in defence of that feeling ; I only allude to it as a fact. Somehow or other we feel that if a man only exercises his intellectual faculties, and deliberately removes himself from the sphere of active effort, he is committing a sort of human suicide ; he is betraying that trust which, in virtue of his will and energy, has been laid upon him from the beginning of making some difference in the world by his action.

Will ethics supply us with help in the conception of which we are in search ? Or rather, is it not in Morality above all that we discover the final grounds for the reality of God's existence ? Let me ask my reader to consider three points. First, the meaning of conscience ; secondly, the meaning of duty ; thirdly, the meaning of good. And here I shall not be afraid of being dogmatic, nor shall I care whether I agree with or dissent from some of the fashionable moral philosophies of the day. What is conscience ? The essence of the conception, that which gives it its peculiar character, is the combination which we find in it of emotional elements and intellectual. It is the sensitive mirror on which are breathed all the shadows of our active life. It is that which lays bare with such unfailing truth the relative value of all the aims and objects to which our action is directed. It steepens the intellectual recognition of what we have done or should do in a warm atmosphere of emotion. It practically denies the severance of feeling and thought because in itself it is both feeling and thought. You may tell me that its natural history can be traced, you may say that it has arisen out of all sorts of

conditions of expediency or utility. The analysis may or may not be correct, but I must repeat that explanation does not alter the value of the conception, nor does the account of how a thing came to be alter the nature of that which it is. I take conscience, as you find it in the highest, most morally developed men and women whom you know. What is this strange judging and feeling power which has guided their path in life? What can it be, except the eternal vindication of men's position as the sons of God and the inheritors of a Divine nature? This, perhaps, some one will say, is mere rhetoric. Let us turn, therefore, to the second of those conceptions of Morality to which I have already referred. What is duty? Its essence is obligation. Man feels that, in reviewing possible courses of action, there is one path which he *must* follow, that if he refuses he has in some fashion given up his true position in nature, and that this infraction of the law of obligation will bring him under the terrible punishment of remorse. Some of us in a modern age are fond of whittling away the meaning of obligation and remorse. Remorse, we are told, is disappointment that we have made a mistake, that we have miscalculated, misinterpreted our main interests. Remorse has nothing to do with either disappointment or miscalculation; it is not a recognition of mistakes, it is the agonised feeling that we have committed a crime. That is the imperative sanction of all Morality—not an external sanction, not legal punishment, not social ostracism, but the voice, alternately pleading and threatening, of our inner moral nature. It appears, then, that we live under a law of obligation, and obligation implies at least two terms, the obliged and the obliger. We understand at once who the obliged are. It is ourselves; it is we on whom is laid the difficult burden of a duty to fulfil. But

it is nonsense to speak of an obliged unless the other term is equally explicit ; who or what is the obliger ? Is it not the Divine Spirit who rules the universe and holds up to man the ideal at which he is, in whatever hesitating or halting fashion, forced to aim ?

Turn, finally, to the last conception, the meaning of good. What is good ? It is the attainment of happiness, says one class of thinkers. It is the subservience to the greatest interests of mankind, says another class. But good is neither happiness nor utility. If we only avail ourselves of explanations like these we cannot unlock the secret of man's actions in the past or read aright the historic pages which tell of many of his noblest deeds. The martyr, the leader of the forlorn hope, the preacher of a crusade, the Man who died on the cross, ask these whether good means utility or happiness, and the answer is not difficult to anticipate. But observe what follows. If good is not happiness or utility or welfare, how are we going to define it ? Is it a tautological term ? Are we forced to say that good is that which is good ? Are we to content ourselves with so vacant, so meaningless an ideal ? We shall have so to content ourselves if there be no God. Once grant the existence of Divinity, once grant the reality of a moral order which is slowly being executed in all the developing series of natural existence and all the pages of the world's history, and good is no longer meaningless. We have got the key to unlock its meaning. It is first the fulfilment of a moral order ; it is next the fulfilment of the will of God. And observe how such a conception brings back to us the necessity for enlightenment, for culture, for knowledge, for thought ; it is not an intuitive conception, this good ; it is something the meaning of which we have to discover. We have to study Science, History, in order that we may find out how

the Divine will is being fulfilled ; and instead of the old, arid, dry idea of being good in order that we may be happy hereafter, we have arrived at a conception the richness and fulness of which are practically inexhaustible. On us are laid at once the privilege and the burden of first discovering and then helping in the fulfilment of a world-wide Moral order—of being in the truest sense fellow-workers with God.

W. L. COURTNEY.

*January, 1905.*





## INTRODUCTORY LETTERS

### I

THE Church Congress begins, I believe, its annual sessions at Liverpool next week. Doubtless the learned divines and devout laymen who are privileged to address the meetings will discuss many things—points of ritual, points of Biblical interpretation, points of ecclesiastical discipline, and the like, with which we are only too familiar from past experience of such gatherings. The fatal defect, which mars the value of the Congress, is that it takes too much for granted. It starts from a platform which is not universally accepted. It chatters about details, when the very ground plan is not settled. The assumption on which it proceeds is that we all believe, and that we are all Christians. But do we believe? and if so, what? Are we Christians? and if so, in what sense of that ambiguous term? This is the preliminary question, the problem of all problems, which troubles many sensitive and thoughtful students, who look on the world as it is, and contrast it with the world as the divines complacently regard it. It is not a pleasant inquiry on which I ask to be allowed to write; it is a very disturbing and serious thing. Earnest people cannot help asking themselves the question with which I start, and if I occupy a good deal of your space my only excuse is that I know of no topic more transcendently important, nor one



which should be treated with more reverent earnestness. Scepticism itself is very wistful and sad-eyed nowadays. The last thing in the world which Agnosticism attempts at the present time is to be truculent or dogmatic. Science often talks with bated breath. How much more, then, should those of us who are neither Sceptics, Agnostics, Atheists, nor Scientists walk warily, taking the shoes off our feet when we come to holy ground?

Do we believe? A definite creed has both its religious and its ethical aspects; it formulates dogmas and it teaches morality. On some of the theological postulates and axioms of Christianity I desire to say nothing. It would ill become me to discuss in the columns of a daily newspaper the ultimate mysteries which this Cosmos and its government suggest and involve, or the solutions which the Fathers of the Church have proposed to these ultimate problems. But I will take some issues based on a broader or commoner ground. The religious assumption is that this world is not of value or importance in or for itself, but solely as a preparation, or, as some would phrase it, a state of trial, a probationary sphere, in view of an awful world that is to come. Do we believe that? Faith is not of much use unless it supplies motives for action or settled convictions of thought. Do we act as if we believed that this world was a preparation for the next? Is the prevalent cast of our minds one in which the present is tinged with the mystery of the future? Long ago some one remarked that if people really believed in a Hell they would neither marry nor give in marriage—they could hardly eat their dinners. That, of course, is an extreme and pedantic view; nor is it of much consequence, for I take it that hardly any one nowadays believes seriously in a Hell of everlasting torments. But if the world is ruled by justice which is to realise itself elsewhere, there

must be some form of future punishment or retribution, just as there must be some form of reward and recompense. Well, what is our belief in Heaven? If it means anything, it must be a strange reversal of all our worldly standards—a reversal where goodness is put above fame. It means the triumph of obscure and unrecognised virtue, the equality of all men and women before the Omnipotent, in which the workman is as good as his master, the poor slavey the social equal of her mistress. Or it is a place of piety and rest, where everything that bored us here, like saying prayers and singing hymns, becomes an object of interest and zeal. Do we believe it? Do we act as if we believed it? Would we welcome Heaven on these terms? And, if not, what is our faith in this matter? The very word "Faith" is strangely baffling. "*Credo quia impossibile*," said an ancient Church writer. How can we believe what we do not understand; and even if we did, what would our faith be worth? Faith without works is dead. Where are the works which show that we believe in Heaven and Hell—in another world at all? It is no good to dismiss these as old and familiar questions. Have they ever been answered?

A religion must necessarily issue in Morality. Whether we take it that Religion is Morals touched with emotion, or Morals Religion reduced to practice, in either case there must be some tenets or principles of a practical kind to guide us in the difficult thoroughfares of life. The Sermon on the Mount is, I suppose, our ethical text-book, just as the life of the Divine Founder of our religion is the great Exemplar of how we ought to live. Now I do not wish to be tedious in going through a series of points in detail, and therefore I will give only in a sort of tabular form some of the salient items which have always occupied the attention of students and ordinary readers. The Ser-

mon on the Mount—illustrated as it is by Christ's life—contains a series of ideals. Here are some :—

The ideal of poverty.

The ideal of humility.

The ideal of "turning the other cheek" (the absence of revenge).

The ideal of self-sacrifice.

The ideal of loving an enemy.

The ideal of innocence.

The ideal of sexual purity, in thought, as well as in action.

And here are some of the axioms of the world's creed :—

The ideal of wealth.

The ideal of ostentation, smartness, notoriety.

The ideal of self-assertion and blowing one's own trumpet.

The ideal of trampling on others and rising at their expense.

The ideal of personal enjoyment, selfishness, refined or coarse.

The ideal of compromise (the politician's ideal).

The ideal of "sowing one's wild oats," and "a rake makes the best husband," &c.

The ideal of fashionable impurity.

Which of these two creeds do we believe? They are absolutely antithetical and contradictory. We cannot believe both. It would seem, judging by the world as we find it and see it every day before our eyes in every great capital, that we act on the second creed and murmur with our lips the first. The Christian ethics are a vivid example of the "*credo quia impossibile*." The worldly ethics are an instance of the faith which issues in works. Our Christianity would seem to be a splendid hypocrisy. Again, I ask—Do we believe? What do we believe?

Have I drawn the picture too harshly? Good Heavens! Think of the millionaire calling himself a Christian in the face of the text, "How hardly shall they that have riches (or trust in riches) enter into the kingdom of God"! Think of the politician calling himself a Christian in view of the texts, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," and "Ye shall not do evil that good may come"! Think of the sensualist calling himself a Christian confronted by the text, "Whosoever shall look upon a woman——"! Think of our smart leaders of society calling themselves Christians and repeating the words, "Blessed are ye poor—blessed are ye when men shall hate you and revile you and persecute you"! I am not a preacher nor a prophet, although I am afraid that my theme tends to be didactic. I am only an observer of life. And I ask—Do we believe?

The time has come, surely, when we can dare to look things in the face and eschew all mealy-mouthed falsehoods. The ordinary, worldly life is a practical scepticism—when it is not a worship of Baal. I know that there are many quiet and religious people who live simply, who do justice and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God. I know also that there are some reverent and serious Agnostics who have tried to think out problems for themselves, and have conscientiously attained to conclusions mainly negative. But I am not at present concerned with either. I am speaking of the vast majority, the men and women of the world; of ourselves, in short, as an average mass. Do we believe?

I am, Sir, faithfully yours,

OXONIENSIS.

## II

The human heart is ceasing to be dogmatic, but it has not ceased to be devout. Modern intelligence will not

consent to be cramped by the precise catechism of any creed, or to be fettered in thought and spirit by the sixteenth-century formulas upon which all the Churches are in reality founded. Life can but come from life, and the true spiritual vitality that might still be a force in men perishes under the cold touch of the theological dead hand. But the sense of mystery only deepens as sectarianism decays. Are we religious? Yes, a thousand times, in the name of the primal sympathy, which, having been, must ever be. Do we believe? No. What realistic mind dare speak for the majority and affirm the contrary? Yet in laying stress upon the negative side of this paradox your searching correspondent, "Oxonienis," draws the colours of his philosophy, as I would fain think, from a too sombre palette. To any man with open eyes the materialism of the day seems rank enough. Look exclusively that way, and we perceive at once that manners improve a great deal faster than morals. Self-indulgence seems to be chiefly limited by expense. The golden calf was never so extensively worshipped in any age. Our institutions are not what they seem—shall we remind ourselves of the elementary but remarkable fact that polygamy, for instance, in spite of the fundamental precepts supposed to be generally "believed," remains for all practical purposes an informal institution of the West, which affects to lift its palms and eyelids in discussing the morals of Asia? A trivial cynicism saps constructive powers. We are good-natured enough as being in all respects a softer race than that which went before. We think we compound for habits of selfishness by fits of that sort of charity which is often that subtle and sensitive form of modern egoism which hates to have its ease disturbed by the sight or thought of pain. The age, as critics of literature observe, lacks satire as well as drama, and with as much on the



whole that calls for chastisement—less in some ways, more in others—as in the time of Juvenal and Dryden, there is no hand to wield the scourge. Very well.

That is one side of it all, but only one side, and it is not that one which immediately concerns us. Faith and morals ought to go strictly together, but do not. The Sybarite is sometimes the most superstitious of mankind ; we all know Agnostics, on the other hand, whose lives are a pattern of honour and austerity. Sin, like the poor, will be always with us. Anthony yielding to temptation may cease to be a saint and remain a believer. The tremendous problem propounded by "Oxoniensis" in three words is essentially one not of morals, but of faith ; and it is the less obvious problem but much the greater one of the two. Your correspondent does not ask, "Do we practise?" Alas ! we do not, but that is no difficulty of to-day. That is the question of all times and climes ; and classic sages in the pre-Christian period, like Herbert Spencer in our own, could preach a theory of virtue upon purely secular principles. That they preached it effectually I neither say nor think. Christianity in all its forms has been the greatest practical improver of conduct that the world has ever seen. No machinery for replacing it has ever been discovered. The problem engaging us, then, is not, "Do we practise?" but, "Do we believe?" If we do not, the ultimate effect on moral practice will, no doubt, be considerable ; and it is open to any member of the Church Congress to argue once more that the decay of faith means the loosening of the keystone which holds the whole arch of the moral order together.

Leave out the sensualists by preference, who choose to live the base life on the base level, and do not care about "the obstinate questionings." Take the people—and they are the vast number with whom the Church Congress has

to deal—who do care. They strive towards the best light they know. They are religious by instinct, but sceptical by intelligence towards all the systems of all the sects. The tender and gracious visions of belief fade, fade, fade in the relentless light of modern investigation. We are losing that by which existence was transfigured and the strength of the world inspired. Slowly and fatally ebbs the unreturning tide of real and living faith in unnumbered spirits, whom that deprivation leaves alone upon a shore stretching dry and desolate. They whom this sort of reluctant disbelief insensibly invades endure a pain from which it is to be presumed the members of the Church Congress and all the genuine adherents of all the sects are free. Those in whom the old imaginative faith burns low or sinks to ashes do not lead worse lives by consequence, if not ill-livers by temperament, but they lead less happy ones. What the orthodox think it necessary to talk about is the iniquity of unbelief. Nay, the problem with which they ought to deal is the tragedy of unbelief. "Oxoniensis" would perhaps agree with me that Omar Khayyam penetrates the psychology of modern feeling like no words that ever come from modern pulpits :—

"Oh, threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise!  
One thing at least is certain—this life flies;  
One thing is certain, and the rest is lies;  
The flower that once has blown for ever dies.

Heaven but the vision of fulfilled desire,  
And Hell the shadow from a soul on fire,  
Cast on the darkness, into which ourselves,  
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire."

Those stanzas are the epitome of that calm and poignant modern pessimism which remains at heart religious, and to which mere Atheism seems, from the purely intellectual



and scientific view, less rational than the crudest tenets of the straitest sects. But apart from that conviction of the essential Divinity of the Unseen, the dogmas rattle like dry bones in an Ezekiel's valley where no wind blows. Can the Church Congress help? Will the Church Congress answer? Not with the stereotyped form of words, the conventional apologetics, the nebulous assurances, that win no entrance to the ear within the ear. We do not want the conventional discussions that beat against the problem in vain. It is singular to remark that, while the modern world is ceasing to believe in the Churches, the Churches have never yet been effectually stirred up for the work of stopping the rot. Yet their main business lies not with the people who are bad, but with the people who are perplexed. Can we find new formulas to express again the living faith of one great Church distinguishing all who believe in the Divine interpretation of things from those who are content with the theory of mechanical materialism? To that theory, in Huxley's words, "Man is but the cunningest of Nature's clocks." The universe is one vast clockwork, and the conception of a clockmaker is left out. Wordsworth's magnificent lines upon the sea-shell express the eternal idealism of countless minds which can frame to themselves no definite belief :—

"I have seen  
A curious child who dwelt upon a tract  
Of inland ground applying to his ear  
The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell ;  
To which, in silence hushed, his very soul  
Listened intensely ; for from within were heard  
Murmurings whereby the monitor expressed  
Mysterious union with its native sea.  
Even such a shell the universe itself  
Is to the ear of faith ; and there are times,  
I doubt not, when to you it doth impart  
Authentic tidings of invisible things ;

## DO WE BELIEVE?

Of ebb and flow and ever-during power,  
And central peace subsisting at the heart  
Of endless agitation."

Yes, but listen to the reply from a more modern poet of less note—the very cry of unwilling belief :—

"The hollow sea-shell which for years hath stood  
On dusty shelves, when held against the ear  
Proclaims its stormy parent ; and we hear  
The faint, far murmur of the breaking flood.  
We hear the sea. The sea ? It is the blood  
In our own veins, impetuous and near,  
And pulse keeping pace with hope and fear,  
And with our feelings' ever-shifting mood.  
Lo ! in my heart I hear, as in a shell,  
The murmur of a world beyond the grave,  
Distinct, distinct, though faint and far it be.  
Thou fool ! this echo is a cheat as well—  
The hum of earthly instincts ; and we crave  
A world unreal as the shell-heard sea."

Take either of these views, for either is intellectually tenable, and modern men will choose the majestic declaration, the despairing answer, according to the temperament they are born into or the happiness they have found. But both are sincere attempts to face the fundamental issue of belief. Both reduce to irrepressible triviality the ordinary accents of the ordinary pulpit. When Sir Roger de Coverley wanted to hear good sermons we remember he bought his chaplain a library of the best. It was a pious and shrewd method. Sermons, in the immense majority of cases, are not good, but bad. They ought to fill the churches. They do a good deal to empty the churches. It is the rarest thing in the world to hear a pulpit deliverance which seems to an educated mind to touch the root of the matter. What the Churches have to grapple with is the problem of getting

themselves listened to, and if that is to be done they will have to bring to bear upon the task a higher order of powers and a much more penetrating philosophy. Sir Oliver Lodge and Mr. Balfour have recently shown that the loud dogmas of middle Victorian science are as obsolete as the theological dogmas they pretended to refute. Science gives no answer whatever to the problems of belief and conduct. It leaves mankind to choose between two moods. "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity," expresses the one; "mystery of mysteries, and all is mystery," expresses the other. The Churches are bound to undertake some drastic revision of this method of appealing to men, unless modern people, whose religious instincts the Churches do not satisfy, are to be driven more and more to seek some approximation to the satisfaction of the spirit in Nature, in the poets, in music, and in the new mysticism which Science in its later developments more and more encourages. If the Church Congress discusses the remedies for the decay of belief in minds full of the religious instinct, it must remember that deeper words than we are wont to hear are needed. In the words of the King of Denmark's answer to Erasmus, "Small doses will not do." In the differences between the sects modern men take less and less interest. The Churches present different façades, but the variety of architecture is less important than the fact that the foundations are slowly settling under the lot.

Yours, &c.,

X.

### III

When your brilliant correspondent "Oxoniensis" opened this momentous controversy in your columns, he could not have expected—and, perhaps, hardly hoped—that the

discussion would, or could, be confined within the limits he sought to lay down. If this question be answered in the affirmative, it still raises the further query, "What do we believe?" But the whole tenour of your correspondent's letter is an implicit negative to his own question. When he sets "the sweet impossible counsels" of the Sermon on the Mount side by side with those of the practical and work-a-day world as revealed by common experience, he has answered himself. If, indeed, conduct be the test of belief, then we are living in a world tenanted, with almost insignificant exceptions, by "unbelievers." The first thought that must occur to minds moved by the forcible interrogation administered by "Oxoniensis" is to ask whether the leaders of religion, now or at any time, have acted upon the principles enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount. To limit the inquiry to the present, Does militant Anglicanism or aggressive Nonconformity conform in its attitude one towards the other with the precepts inculcated by the Founder of Christianity? Do the Roman Catholics and Protestants of Ireland love one another in any other sense than that of Isaac Walton, who advocated impaling a frog upon a hook "as if you loved him"? In the sectarian struggle in Scotland at this moment is either the "Wee Kirk" or the United Free Churches moved by the spirit of absolute self-negation, which is the very essence of the Sermon on the Mount? Again, to ask the question is to answer it.

But is the connection between belief and conduct as intimate as "Oxoniensis" assumes it to be? Experience, as "X." has admirably pointed out, and, indeed, as "Oxoniensis" practically admits, assures us that it is not. Even in regard to things we know, which stand outside the sphere of "things believed," there is no necessary

connection between intellectual acceptance of truth and practical conduct. The civilised adult—as distinguished from the savage and the child—knows (he does not merely believe) that excess in alcoholic indulgence will result in physical, moral, and mental decay; yet his knowledge does not deter him from gratifying his appetite. The Latin poet summed up this theory in the words, “*Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor.*” If, then, knowledge unaided does not determine conduct, how can we expect belief—necessarily a less potent factor—to do so? Inability to accept as proved historical facts the various data upon which all religions ultimately rest is not a proof of moral incapacity. Is it an incentive to moral delinquency? All religions except the most depraved embody ideals, and ideals are potent factors in the regulation of conduct; the higher, then, the ideal furnished by any creed, the higher the standard not only of those who accept the creed, but of those who have been born and bred and lived their lives within its sphere. If Christianity were abandoned to-morrow by universal consent, its influence would still be one of the chief moral factors through all the ages yet to come. But to admit, or rather to assert, this elementary truth is very far indeed from proof that conduct depends upon belief. Belief is a great moral factor, but it is not the only one, for if it were, then, to adapt some words of Hobbes, “before the dawn of Christianity no man ever determined his conduct on a high moral standard, and since its advent not one in ten thousand doth.”

There are two assumptions underlying the Christian creed, as set forth in the propositions of “*Oxoniensis*,” and generally accepted, which have always seemed to me of doubtful validity, and of even more questionable morality. They are: (1) That a belief in future rewards



and punishments is an essential to any religious creed and to any effective code of morality; and (2) that the life of man upon earth is exclusively, or mainly, a preparation for a life to come. To do right and to eschew wrong because so to behave is immediately prudent, and will be ultimately profitable, is surely to degrade morality to its lowest utilitarian basis. There is a well-known and beautiful legend of St. Louis meeting an old woman who carried a bucket of water in one hand and a bundle of faggots in the other. Asked by the King for what purpose her burdens were destined, the old woman replied, "With one I wish to extinguish the fires of Hell, and with the other to burn down Heaven, that men may do that which is right, not from fear of punishment or hope of reward, but solely out of love of God." The allegory needs no interpretation. The idea of future reward and punishment seems to me at least purely anthropomorphic, and based upon a rude application of mundane judicial systems. But even from the human point of view, double punishments and double rewards are immoral. Sin, however you define it, entails either positively or negatively its own penalty upon the offender; positively in the endurance of actual suffering; negatively in the exclusion from the higher happiness conveyed by purity and unselfishness. And surely, on the most orthodox hypothesis, there is the most palpable inconsistency between the belief that this earthly life of ours is only a transient preparation for the life to come, and the impenetrable screen drawn, as theologians admit, between us and any conception of the nature of that life. The whole aim, as it seems to me, of the Sermon on the Mount was to lay down ideals for the perfect human life on earth, without reference to what lies beyond the veil. To say that the ideal is unattainable is only another way of saying that it is an ideal. The wise prelate who dared

to assert that "he would rather see England free than England sober" also boldly admitted the disagreeable truth that "foreign politics could not be conducted on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount." To attain to that ideal is not now, and may never be possible, but it is feasible to approximate thereto, and such an approximation is not dependent upon dogmatic beliefs—the tautology is excusable—either as to a future life or the supreme mystery of the universe.

I have written throughout of "right and wrong," and of the "moral sense"; and the orthodox will tell me that the words are meaningless without the sanction of a religious creed. Against that judgment I appeal to the consciousness of the individual. "Right and wrong" are relative terms, whose constitutions vary with times and seasons, and race, position, and antecedents. People are apt to confuse results with motives; expediency and in expediency with rightness and wrongness. Again, I appeal to the individual consciousness, and I ask if it be not true that at the moment of action—independently of after-thoughts and consequences—every human being is not conscious of a moral sense which dictates to him not what is absolutely right or absolutely wrong, but what is right or wrong for him or her to do then and there. How we came by that moral sense is a question as wide as that of the problem of human existence and history; but there it is, independent of, though not uninfluenced by, beliefs and Creeds. Consciousness of the reality of that moral sense is the one lasting consolation amid the wreck of creeds and the disillusionment of Faith.—Yours, &c.,

HOMO.

## IV

The beginning of the twentieth century is not a time "when politics have been dull, theology dormant, and science undemonstrative" ; on the contrary, both in world politics and in scientific development it has already been touched by the wand of the magician. In all spheres there is a trumpet call to realise the foundations of our beliefs, and it is typical of the age that the greatest of all questions should be raised, not in the cloister or the quadrangle, but in the columns of the daily Press, the only arena of free discussion that mob law has left us.

Looking to the commonwealth, both insular and oceanic, what matters is not the standpoint of the professor or the parson, but of the average sensible and educated citizen, whom Palmerston used to designate as "the man on the knife-board of the omnibus." By what canons and by what creed does he regulate his conduct? How does he regard the eternal problem? The census recently taken by one of your contemporaries of attendance at church and chapel in the county of London, and the eye-witness of every churchgoer outside, proves how small a proportion of the male population are to be found within the walls of a place of worship. Only to-day in a big church in a big town I felt myself a stray in a regiment of women. Whatever may be pretended or assumed, dogmatic religion, as distinct from the inherited, or, perhaps, intuitive, ideas of the eternal and universal, does not, if we are to judge from what Carlyle called "religious drill-exercise," make the lives of our men what they are. To say that Englishmen are anywhere hostile to Christianity or to the Church of England, as by law established, is undeniably false. There is not, nor has there ever been, such a state of public feeling as makes attendance, even occasional, at

church in France a bar to public office, high or low. On the contrary, there is the widest tolerance of mind and charity in action, save among a few zealots in scattered congregations. "If we are not ourselves pious," said Pope Julius II., "why should we prevent other people from being so?" Whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not, the standpoint of the average citizen is ✓ indifference.

I fear it cannot be claimed that this "sweet reasonableness" is due to any decline in the deep-seated pugnacity of the British race, for when the dogmas of political economy are challenged and assailed, the conflict waxes as fierce as it did over the religious schisms of the seventeenth century, and men fight one another in the railway carriages as they did of old in the tented field. Dogmatic spleen and bitterness have only shifted their ground.

How far conduct has been modified by the decline of faith in religious sectarianism it is difficult to say. The blind and uncritical belief of the Russian moujik does not save him from the sottishness of a debased existence. Statistics of crime and morality prove what they are meant to prove, and no more. The offences and failings of one age are not necessarily those of another, and perhaps they move in cycles of uncertain duration. Still more is this the case when you abandon the domain of positive law for the misty regions of public opinion; when you measure the normal morality by the ideal standard. The "selfless" man seems as far removed in the empyrean as he ever was.

My fellow Oxoniensis drew in stately language the familiar contrast between the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount and the current maxims of the age, which in essentials do not differ much from century to century, whether contained in the letters of Lord Chesterfield to

his son or of "A Self-made Merchant" to his son. Human nature finds its level whatever the dogma, and no change in character seems to eradicate its fundamental tendencies. The difference is one of manifestation. However, "the mill of God grinds slowly," and we are comforted by the notion that manners are softened as knowledge is immeasurably widened and more generally diffused. This all makes for human betterment; and if, concurrently, the ideals of life are steadfastly held up by the preachers and teachers, whether in the church, the school, or the market-place, the *cognitio rerum divinarum* which sterilised the Middle Ages need not torment us as it did them. The vital faith is the faith in the ascent of man.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

SPERANS.



SECTION I

*FAITH*



## SECTION I

### *FAITH*

#### THE BISHOP OF CROYDON

IT is, I should imagine, manifest to all that the evidences of the Christian faith cannot be adequately produced in a correspondence like this. I wish to be allowed to point out the extreme importance of being on our guard against, unconsciously, pursuing our inquiry with the slightest trace of prejudice or unfairness. I have noticed, for example, that some persons make the statement that large numbers of the clergy are themselves unbelievers. How is that arrived at? Some, indeed, may have made statements showing a certain amount of heterodoxy on some minor points of our belief, but to admit their disbelief upon the essential points which are the true matters of controversy now being carried on in your columns would be at once to expose them to deprivation of their office. They have made no such admission. But is the statement of their unbelief based upon the inconsistency of their lives with the noble profession which they make? Let us remember that the profession which we make is a perfect one; that the ideal which we have to teach men to aim at is nothing short of this; and that it would be impossible for a Divine revelation to set before us a less exalted one. It follows, then, that every human professor

of such a faith must come short of his profession, and thus be guilty of some measure of inconsistency. But it does not follow that they are willing hypocrites, and do not believe the truths which they endeavour to teach. May I give you an example of my meaning? And although I am an absolutely convinced believer, and a clergyman to boot, may I venture to hope that my words will, none the less, be accepted by those who do not share with me in the Christian belief as the words of an honest and truth-loving man? I knew, years ago, a clergyman who had taken orders when he was over thirty years of age, on account of the sudden and deep conviction of the truths of Christianity which came upon him. He was a man of good private means, and he had formed the terrible inebriate habit. But in preparing himself for ordination he had conquered this, and for five long years prior to his ordination he had rigidly abstained. On becoming a clergyman he gave his services gratuitously, and chose the poorest and most hard-working parishes in which to labour. He was most good to the poor, and was beloved by them. Some few years after his ordination he had a slight sunstroke, which was enough, however, to revive the dormant craving for intoxicants within him, and for a few miserable weeks he might have been seen drunk in the open streets. Deep and full was his repentance. His grief was so extreme that his friends feared his suicide. But after three long years of probation he was again allowed to take up work, again gratuitously given, and again amongst the poorest, which he carried on faithfully and well. No doubt, had he been seen by some unbelievers reeling drunk in his clerical garb, they would have said, "So much for the sincerity of his belief," and yet I dare affirm that he was, to the very core of his heart, a sincere believer, and I dare further to add that he gave

abundant evidence of his sincerity in his laborious and self-denying life, in spite of his sad, sad lapse. We cannot judge one another thus, nor is it given to any to be able fairly to say, "Large numbers of the clergy themselves do not believe." Such an inquiry as this must be conducted on absolutely fair methods. In the next place, may I plead that the Christian faith should be judged by the life and by the teaching of its great Founder alone; and, judged by that alone, what does it place before us? In place of a cold, pitiless, impersonal Power as the Creator of the world, it shows an Almighty Father of such wondrous love to His earthly children that He sent His own Divine Son to take our form upon Him that He might help and guide and teach us. It spreads before us teaching which, if accepted by all the world, would end, *per saltum*, its difficulties and its troubles. The war in the East would end to-day. The Fiscal Question would be solved if nations, as well as individuals, were animated by the spirit of His teaching. What Licensing Acts would be required when all were temperate and sober? How could religious education remain a difficulty? How could capital and labour represent antagonistic powers when the brotherhood of man was truly recognised and practised by us all? Sir, it is because the world has not accepted, and because so few people truly have accepted, the religion of Jesus Christ our Lord that the world is in the parlous state we see it still. How fair a world would it become to-morrow if, with the rising of to-morrow's sun, we all could awake real Christians! To-night the sun would set upon battles of hideous bloodshed, upon scenes of glittering vice and brutal degradation, upon squalor and drunkenness, and lust and hate, and cruelty and evil. But to-morrow more than the half of this would be immediately at an end, and the remainder would be on the road to a



swift and certain remedy. It would be a change only to be compared to that which, after a sudden snowstorm, comes upon some foul and grimy mining district, and makes it, until trodden by the feet of men, wholly white and beautiful and fair. If I am not trespassing too much upon your space, I should like to add that, whilst it is not surprising that, in their search for truth, all, even honest men, should not be able at once to find it, it is always as much a subject of wonder, as it is of deep regret, to find people who are fully acquainted with the claims and aims and history of Christianity working for its overthrow with evident pleasure and delight. To me it is as if they were to go to Netley Abbey or Tintern and to be keen and eager to pull down those ancient and beautiful remains, though the site on which they stand was unneeded for any other purpose. Christianity to them is, unhappily, a ruin. But must they not admit that it is gloriously beautiful, in its claims, in its teaching, in its venerable antiquity? And what have they to give us in its place? There stands the mighty bulk of the sorrows, the suffering, the inequalities, the wretchedness of life. What can they give us which will help to mitigate, to assuage, to comfort, to strengthen in the bearing of these when they have pulled down, if they could, the last vestiges of belief in our most beautiful and holy faith? Surely to the most convinced of unbelievers there must come some moments of doubt and of uncertainty? "Supposing, after all, that Christianity were true; that the Son of God did come and live that beautiful and patient and suffering life, and die that awful and shameful death, out of the profundity of His love for us; supposing that His lips Divine did speak the words of the Sermon on the Mount: What will be the nature of the work that I shall have done if I have given my life to persuade my fellow-men that so full, so beautiful a revela-

tion of the love of God was not true?" Surely some such question as this must at times flash across the mind of even the most convinced of unbelievers. If it does, at such times they cannot be happy or content. No human heart or mind has even adequately grasped the full significance of the words, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is not an heritage to be lightly thrown away.

H. H. CROYDON.

### DEAN OF WESTMINSTER

I have read the original letter again and again with an increasing sense of the timeliness of the question and of the wise reserve with which it is expressed. I am grateful to the writer, first, for the personal form in which he has couched his inquiry. He does not criticise systems, but inquires for the faith of individuals. He avoids the usual sarcasm about contending Churches and warring sects. He sees that this cannot relieve individuals from the responsibility of accepting or refusing the ideal of the Gospel. I feel grateful to him, in the second place, for his restraint in limiting the range of his inquiry. I conceive that, whether he himself has found solutions to some of the mysterious problems of theology or not, he has faced many of them with a clear eye and a courageous heart; and that, after all, he would say with Faber:—

"Ah, there is less to try our faith  
In our mysterious creed,  
Than in the godless look of earth  
In these our hours of need."

Accordingly he does not deal with points in dispute. He takes two fundamental propositions, on which all

Christians agree. He confines his question for the moment to these. If there be a future life, it is undeniable that this life is a term of preparation for it. Do we believe that there is? Do we show that we believe by preparing for it? That is one inquiry. The other concerns the plain teaching of Christ in the Gospel. Christ blesses the poor, the humble, the sorrowful, the suffering; the world congratulates the rich, the self-asserting, the merry, the popular. Christ condemns revenge; the world admires it, at any rate, on the large scale. Christ forbids impurity; the world winks at it, at any rate, in men. Do we accept Christ's ideal, or the world's? Which do we try to act up to? Worldly men never resent such an inquiry as this when it is made in regard to society in general; of course, they do not like, though they respect, those who press it on them as individuals. Why do professed Christians resent it, as much of the correspondence in your columns shows that they do? Do we believe? Yes, at bottom, many of us do. We are almost afraid to say so, because to say so is to challenge a comparison between our profession and our lives. We cannot all embrace poverty; we have the work of the world to carry on, but we do aim at a life of service, and if we attained it we should be "poor in spirit." We believe, and at the same moment ask help for our unbelief. Others of us cannot say thus much—perhaps the great majority of us at present. It is deeply humiliating to confess it. Yet we do not resent the question of your correspondent. We thank him and you, Sir, for stating it so plainly and forcing it on the notice of so many.

J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON.

Deanery, Westminster.

## BISHOP HERFORD

Faith is not swallowing undigested propositions beyond our ken, but direct vision, a faculty of the soul as real and as capable of cultivation as eyesight. We "see" that a spiritual fact is true. We have three degrees of belief, viz., what we profess, what we think we believe, and what we really believe. The spirit of our life and our actions is the measure of what we really believe—*vide* martyrs. We must distinguish between truths and saving truths; saving truths are those which directly affect conduct and give spiritual force. We must dig and sift and search amongst the masses of doctrine till we find those beliefs which most effectively result in moral conduct, self-forgetfulness, and holiness (*i.e.*, healthiness of spirit, complete sanity). Perhaps the rock on which most who lose faith make shipwreck is the fact that men are devoted and enthusiastic partisan "Catholics," "Churchmen," or "Non-conformists," instead of being devoted and enthusiastic Christians. Our Lord was surely more anxious that His followers should have love one towards another (John xiii. 35) than that they should be "sound" on the relations of Church and State, Pope and Bible. The mass of Christians, or those who lead the mass, will not, as yet, put the first things first, but still (Mark vii. 9, R.V.) put secondary matters before the great essentials—love, justice, sincerity, personal religion. Seeing the jealousies and divisions among Christ's professed followers, numbers lose faith in Christ—for how can those who are quarrelling effectively preach a gospel of peace? Great masses of workers desert the Christian Church in despair, because, through internal divisions, the Christian body is too weak to enforce the laws of Christ in industrial life, depend-

ing, as it does, too much on money and worldly honour. We want ministers of religion who will teach that genuine spiritual religion and genuine physical science are co-ordinate and by no means opposed to one another ; that the taking refuge in case-hardened tradition is a form of timid Agnosticism and want of faith in a Living God who requires His ministers to understand and constantly reinterpret His revelations in the language of the age ; that the authority of the New Testament is increased by being placed on a rational basis ; that Holy Scripture, the Sacraments, and the real Creed of Nicæa (*i.e.*, the almost unknown shorter form) are a sufficient basis of communion between Christian Churches. How many Christians are there who would work for such a revitalisation of our common faith ?

VERNON HERFORD, Titular Bishop of Mercia.

Church of the Divine Love, Cowley St. John, Oxford.

### PREBENDARY WEBB-PEPLOE

I have carefully read the article by "Oxoniensis" ; I wish I had time to answer it fully. I have seldom read an article on more important matters, or one more entirely beside the question, when we look at the basis of its complaint. The writer totally fails to realise the aims and object of a Church Congress. We do not meet to consider or discuss the grounds of Christian belief ; but, as fully convinced and confirmed believers in the fundamental truths of the Gospel, to consider how best—with very diverse opinions and starting from many points of view—the already convinced and professedly believing Christian Church of England may carry out her duty towards God and man. We differ—alas ! too often have



wrangled, I fear—upon these matters ; but your correspondent's position or argument is, for the Church Congress, entirely *ultra vires* and out of court. Most thankfully would I see his alternative "ideals" discussed, and the true Christian ideal enforced, both in your columns and in every publication that would permit it ; but it is clearly to the pulpits, the universities, and the religious writings of the day that "Oxoniensis" must look for a full consideration of his difficulties, and not to the Church Congress, which exists for other and specified purposes. "*De principiis*," your writer really argues, and he might well be met on his own grounds by Christian writers who have the requisite time. Unfortunately, I am passing from one field of labour directly to another, and, with much work on hand, I cannot give myself to the task ; but, of what I have ventured in haste to write, I should be right glad if the substance could be made known to clergy and ministers of all denominations. We ought to face the questions raised by "Oxoniensis," and if they could be pressed upon every congregation in the land, and upon every nominal Christian in the world, I cannot but feel that your correspondent would deserve the deep and lasting thanks of all true men and women.

H. W. WEBB-PEPLOE,

Vicar of St. Paul's, Onslow Square, and Prebendary of  
St. Paul's.

#### THE HON. AND REV. JAMES ADDERLEY

The clergy and others seem to me to misunderstand this question so seriously and reverently asked in the admirable letter of "Oxoniensis." It is not, "Do we believe that the facts of the Creed really happened?" but, "Do we believe

in them?" "The devils believe," so far as mere intellectual assent can be called belief. But do we believe in Christ? "Oxoniensis" rightly contrasts the ideals of Christ with the ideals of modern society. If modern society believed in Christ it would believe in His ideals. The really serious matter is that Christians have so largely adopted the ideals of modern society, or, as the Bible calls it, "the world." Mr. Webb-Peploe thinks it beside the mark to ask this question in connection with the Church Congress. It seems to me exactly the time to ask it. For what is the good of Christians discussing little details of Churchmanship if they have not really committed themselves to the fundamental belief in Christ and His ideals of human life? To take one instance. Christians, broadly speaking, think it easier for rich people to enter the kingdom of Heaven than for poor people. Otherwise they would be much more concerned about rich people's souls and less about poor people's. They would protest vigorously against luxury and idleness and gambling and mere pleasure-seeking. But, as a matter of fact, they are continually sending missions to the poor, and scarcely ever concern themselves about the perishing souls of the rich. They worry about "religious education" for the poor, and leave the children of the rich to grow up selfishly and luxuriously at our public schools and universities. This is plainly a disbelief in what Christ said about rich and poor respectively.

JAMES ADDERLEY.

St. Mark's, Marylebone Road.

### FATHER IGNATIUS

I suppose, as we are a professedly Christian country, the question really means, "Do we believe" in Christianity,

as the one and only true religion revealed by God Himself to man? That this religion is revealed in the Bible and concentrated in the Creeds of Christendom are facts accepted by believers and non-believers alike. The simple question, then, really is, "Do we believe" the Bible and the Creeds? Your issue of to-day contains a lengthy paragraph with this heading, "Dean of Westminster on the Bible. Remarkable Address." Yes, Mr. Editor, it is "remarkable." It fully answers the question now debating in your columns. No, we no longer believe in the Bible; it is now our duty to teach that its statements are not true. God's revelation respecting His creation of the world and the fall of man "we do not take now as historical facts, but as imagery which clothes certain spiritual lessons." The Dean owns: "For ourselves, this is not, perhaps, very difficult; but when we come to teach, it is not so easy"! What, then, is Westminster Abbey's answer to the question "Do we believe?"

Cambridge.

IGNATIUS, O.S.B. Monk.

### SIR ROBERT ANDERSON

(Author of "THE BIBLE AND MODERN CRITICISM," Etc.)

The important question which "Oxoniensis" raised so temperately and so aptly in your columns has been largely diverted into a discussion whether Christianity is true. And this has afforded occasion for attacks, some of which are malicious, others merely ignorant, but all alike deplorable. The question is not whether Christianity is a fraud, but whether Christians are a fraud. The truth of Christianity is scarcely a fit subject for a desultory discussion in

a newspaper. Not so, however, the evils and errors and lapses and failures which mark the cults of Christendom and the lives of Christians. Upon that question the honest-hearted man of the world is entitled to be heard. And the digression has been further embarrassed by the popular but mischievous blunder of confounding Christianity with the Christian religion. Archbishop Trench notices in his "Synonyms" that, using the word "religion" in the sense it bears in our English classics, Christianity is not a religion at all. Hence the lament of Laud on his visit to Scotland. He found no altars there, no incense, no images, no priests, "no devotional drill-exercises" (as Carlyle puts it); in short, "no religion at all that I could see, which grieved me much." This it was, too, that inspired the persecution of the Christians by enlightened rulers like Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. On grounds of public policy they required that every one should have a proper religion; but Christianity had not yet degenerated into a religion, and so the Christians were classed as Atheists. This fact is mentioned by both Justin and Tertullian. And Eusebius records that when the Roman pro-consul called upon the aged Polycarp to renounce his fellowship with Christians, he did so in the words, "Repent; say 'Away with the Atheists.'" A man of the world is surely entitled to hold that the religion of Christendom is "the Christian religion"; and, as history testifies, the religion of Christendom has been the most implacable enemy of Christianity. A friendly conversation I had some years ago with one of our Jewish rabbis, who had been reading the New Testament, was interrupted by his turning aside to a bitter denunciation of Christianity because of its persecution of the Jews. I expressed amazement at such ignorance in a man of culture, who had read the Gospels and the history of Christendom. "Persecution is hateful to Christianity,"

I said ; "your enemy has always been 'the Christian religion,' and for every Jew that it has tortured and murdered a score of Christians have suffered the same fate. What was it that inspired the fiendish malignity of the Inquisition ? What was it that lit the fires of Smithfield ? What was it that stamped out Christianity in almost every European country ? The Christian religion." As Froude, the historian, writes : "No means came amiss to it, sword or stake, torture-chamber or assassin's dagger." And, he adds, "All this is forgotten now, forgotten, or even audaciously denied." Yes, not a few of your correspondents seem to have forgotten it. And you, Sir, will do a great service to Christianity if you force it into prominence. Your columns are read in far-off Tokio. And if Christian religionists will not listen, let the Japanese, at all events, know the truth. At this moment they are copying us Westerns ; but the news comes from Japan that their observation of the "Christian religion" has suggested to them the task of framing a new cult that will embrace what is best in both our system and their own. Let them know that the Christian religion is not Christianity, but a perversion of Christianity ; that Christianity is a Divine revelation, and, on its human side, a pure and holy faith, which shows itself in lives of piety and philanthropy. And tell them also that it is not to "Christian England" they should look for the realities and ideals of Christianity, but to the Bible itself—that book upon which our distinctive national character has been formed, and to which, therefore, notwithstanding our national failures and sins, the greatness of our race is due. There is another popular and mischievous error which appears in many of the letters you have published. The personal teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is separated from the Divine revelation of which it is a part, and as



the result the life of a Christian in all his many complex relationships and duties in the world is robbed of its Divine sanction. In the Epistle to the Romans, for example, the magistrate charged with the administration of the criminal law is called "a minister of God" (xiii. 4 and 6). During my reign at Scotland Yard, therefore, I was happy in knowing that in bringing criminals to justice I was doing God's work as really as when I was privileged to stand in a pulpit to preach the Gospel. The ministry of grace is far higher than the ministry of law, but both are equally Divine. And this concerns us all. For if the police and the criminal court have a Divine sanction, there can be nothing unchristian in putting them in motion. And this leads me to enter a protest against the system of setting the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in antagonism to other parts of Holy Scripture. His declaration was explicit that not a tittle of the law should fail. And some of His plainest precepts He Himself revoked in view of His absence. Take one instance. He had forbidden His disciples to carry purse, or scrip, or sword, or to make any provision for the way. "But now," He said in view of the Cross, "he that hath a purse let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." Oriental, though he was, the Apostle Peter took this too literally. Its meaning was clear, that in His absence His people were to fall back upon the position of citizens. And in civilised society we carry the sword by deputy. We act on the Master's words by calling in the police-constable. A still stronger protest I would enter against representing our Divine Lord as a Socialist or Communist. But respect for your space restrains me. I am one of those—a large and increasing class—who have lost all faith in mere religion, but who have unfaltering faith in Christ and Christianity.

And if I refer to the many books I have written upon these great problems, I trust my doing so will not be regarded as the impertinence of self-advertisement, but as the apology and plea I would offer for claiming a hearing in your columns.

Linden Gardens, W.

ROBERT ANDERSON.

My letter which you published the other day entered a protest against that perversion of our Lord's teaching which represents Him as a Socialist. And I quoted the words in which, cancelling His previous commands, He directed His disciples to carry purse and scrip. Even during His earthly ministry He did not enjoin poverty upon all alike. In His Divine sovereignty He called upon some to sell their possessions and to follow Him. But others of His disciples, like the family at Bethany, for example, retained their "substance," and He deigned to receive of it, and even to be their guest. I lay stress on this, because it seems to me there is one very false note in "Oxoniensis'" letter in this regard. There is no saintship in poverty ; there is no sin in wealth. A professional asceticism may be as unchristian as the extravagance of the rich. And this suggests the question : What do we mean by a Christian ? We are all Christians in this country, just as in certain other countries people are Mohammedans or Buddhists. But in the true sense no one of us is a Christian who does not own Christ as his Saviour and his Lord. The note wanting in the "Do we believe ?" correspondence—the Bishop of Croydon struck it—is the truth of Redemption. The Bishop quoted one text ; may I quote another ? "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And a "peculiar people" does not mean a queer people,

as some suppose. The Latin *peculium* gives the sense. It is "a people for His own possession," as the Revised Version phrases it—a people to belong to Him out and out. And so, if the owner of an ancestral home and a great estate becomes a Christian, the grace of God will teach him not to divest himself of his rank and wealth, and of the influence which rank and wealth afford, but to use both aright. To move into a cottage, or to shut himself up in a monastery, leaving his estate to some one who is not a Christian, would bespeak ignorance of, and contempt for, his privileges and responsibilities. Such are "the things which become sound doctrine"—or healthful teaching—as the chapter I have quoted puts it. The emphasis with which this expression is repeated suggests that even in apostolic days there were some who perverted the Sermon on the Mount, as though it taught either asceticism or communism. But "Divine philosophy" is "not harsh and crabbed, as (some people) suppose." "Man of God" is one of the titles of the Christian; and God's men should be the best sort of men for any and every position in the social scale, from the palace to the poor-house. And the God they serve is "the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." There is no taint of asceticism in such words as these. In endorsing "Oxonien-sis'" letter I would enter yet another caveat. To me at least it seems unfair to scold "men and women of the world" (to use his own words)—that is, people who are not Christians—for not living as though they were Christians. Why should they not spend their wealth upon themselves and live for pleasure? Surely they do well to make the most of it, as this world is all they have. It is unreasonable to expect them, as "Oxoniensis" does in effect, to copy the life of the Christian. Their doing so would be, like the rest of their religion, a sort of backsheesh to appease

the Deity. But, as the Apostle said on the Areopagus at Athens, God will accept no backsheesh. He is the great Giver. And when men have received His gifts of pardon and eternal life, and know His peace in their hearts, Christianity from being a mere religion becomes a living faith. For what a man believes is part and parcel of himself; it moulds his character and controls his conduct. What is needed, then, is not that "men and women of the world" should make a still greater pretence of being Christians, and thus afford still more scope for the shafts of scoffers against Christianity, but that real Christians should live pure and earnest lives. And this correspondence is doing more than scores of sermons to promote this very end. To the question "Do we believe?" the Christian gives answer in no doubtful terms. But "to err is human," and inconsistency and failure abound; and the letters in your columns serve as a warning and a tonic.

Linden Gardens, W.

ROBERT ANDERSON.

### REV. G. MARGOLIOUTH

Besides the question whether we do believe, we should, I think, propose to ourselves the inquiry whether we ought to believe. Having recently made an independent examination of the evidence for the appearances of Christ after death, I have myself come to the conclusion that we ought to believe. On the evidence before us, we ought to believe, first of all, that Christ was really present in His own personality when the apostles and other disciples saw Him after the Crucifixion. Secondly, we ought to believe in the doctrines that can logically be derived from these appearances of Christ. If, therefore, we do not believe,

this want of faith on our part does not affect the reality of the great and essential doctrines of Christianity ; in other words, if we do not believe, we ought to believe.

British Museum.

G. MARGOLIOUTH.

Perhaps you will allow me briefly to mention a rule of inquiry which may be of some use to seekers after truth : (1) In matters which lie fully within the comprehension of the human intellect we must, of course, be guided absolutely by intellectual considerations. (2) In matters which partially or entirely lie beyond the range of man's intellectual faculty, but which, nevertheless, appeal strongly to the deeper nature within us, we must follow the leading of the highest and brightest moral and spiritual light known to us. (3) The greatest moral and spiritual light manifested in humanity and to humanity is the light of Jesus Christ. (4) There can be no true following of the higher guidance thus available to us without moral self-surrender on our part to the bidding of the ideal teaching which this guidance involves. (5) In the case of most of us this self-surrender can only be gradually realised within the sphere of the ordinary duties and obligations of everyday life. Very few are called upon to be reformers on a large scale, but all can aim at the improvement of their own character and a truer method of dealing with the common problems of life. (6) It is in such an endeavour that obedience to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount originally referred to by "Oxoniensis" consists. Perfection no one can claim, but all should, in the light of the higher guidance, constantly aim at moving nearer the ideal. This, I think, is, after all, a pleasanter task than many seem to think.

British Museum.

G. MARGOLIOUTH.



## MR. READER HARRIS, K.C.

As one who was an honest Agnostic and is now a believer in Christ, may I be allowed to express my appreciation of the magnificent demonstration which this correspondence has afforded of widespread interest in this subject? Indeed, the volume of testimony which you, Sir, have published, although probably not a hundredth part of what you have received, has practically been a national confession of faith in God. The answer of your columns is, "Yes, we do believe." But what is believing? Believing is faith in action. What, then, is faith? Faith is confidence in God; confidence not only that He will act, but that He will act as He has promised. Faith is based not only on God's word but on His character. Faith is made in Heaven; it is not our faith, but His, the very "faith of God." Paul knew something of faith when he said, "I live by the faith of the Son of God." Therefore, faith is the link that joins man to God, that links promise with answer, and prophecy with fulfilment. Without faith it is "impossible" either "to please God" or to satisfy one's own soul. We are so constituted that we cannot truly exist without believing in some one. There is something in every one of us, even the most debased and sinful, that prompts us to believe God. In the day of visitation, the hour of necessity, of bereavement, or of death men cry to God. Behind the question, "Do we believe?" lies a lesson to us believers to strengthen and exercise the faith that is in us, and show to the world around a people who do believe. How are we to do it? First, by getting to know God better. "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." Then, by feeding our faith on the promises of God. When God called Abraham He gave him

promise after promise, and Abraham fed his faith till it grew strong and vigorous, and he became fully persuaded that what God had promised He was able also to perform. Let us be sure that the faith we have rests on God and not on man. Let us beware of human props which only enfeeble faith. God will educate the faith He has given us. For this purpose He will bring us into varying circumstances. When God's blessings continue to flow in one particular channel we are apt to fix our trust on the channel through which they flow, instead of on their invisible Divine source. Hence the change in our circumstances. Above all, let us exercise the faith God gives us. Trust God definitely about eternal and temporal things. See to it that our desires are in tune with God's desires. Then, resting on the promise of God and fulfilling His conditions, we shall continue to prove, what this remarkable correspondence has so ably demonstrated, that we do believe.

Clapham.

READER HARRIS.

### A COMBINED RESPONSE FROM CAMBRIDGE

In answer to your query, "Do we believe?" we, the undersigned, should like to avail ourselves of this opportunity of expressing our conviction of the reality of the Gospel truths. We do believe God's word about Jesus Christ, that our sins were laid on Him (Isa. liii. 6), because He bore them on the Cross (1 Peter ii. 24), thus making us free from their penalty (Rom. vi. 23); and we have accepted Jesus as our Sin-bearer and Saviour, believing that all our sins are forgiven, because He died in our place (Acts xiii. 38, 39). We also believe God's word about Jesus Christ (Acts ii. 36), that He is our rightful "anointed" King, and we have accepted Him as such in our hearts,

believing that He may be kept enthroned there by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have all humbly striven to serve Him for greater or lesser periods, and each of us has found in Him all the strength we need to live victorious over sin and active in our Master's service.

ARTHUR F. BRADLEY, Christ's College.

O. B. BULL, Jesus College.

R. P. CRABBE, Corpus Christi College.

J. RALPH S. TAYLOR, Pembroke College.

R. T. HOWARD, Jesus College.

D. P. ROBINSON, Clare College.

G. S. INGRAM, Trinity College.

W. TALBOT HINDLEY, Christ's College.

G. G. PAYNE-COOK, Corpus Christi College.

A. R. HARGREAVES, Trinity College.

F. G. CAWSTON, Caius College.

F. W. ARGYLE, St. John's College.

E. HAYWARD, Sidney Sussex College.

Cambridge.

### COMMISSIONER ALEX M. NICOL

For more than twenty-three years I have been an officer of the Salvation Army, and directed various branches of our work in different parts of this country, as well as studied its operations in the Colonies and United States. I have thus been brought into close contact with all classes, more especially the churchless and spiritually neglected. The valuable discussion in your columns has led me to reflect—from one standpoint—upon my past experience. I have met with very few people whose chief difficulty in complying with the dogma (if you like) of the Salvation Army has been intellectual, and the world knows that our dogma is strict enough—perhaps too strict. Many have said that they could not believe in a God who permits pain and disease, and whose Book records that there is a place for the eternally lost ; but, as a rule, when I have got at the heart of such cases I have discovered that the

principal hindrance has been positive sin, in some shape or form. A horse-dealer at Rugby was a loud-sounding unbeliever. He occasionally came to our meetings and aired his theories. One evening the Spirit of God—as I think—hooked the truth to his conscience. His infidel ideas were not flouted in our teeth that night. After a short conversation with him on the more practical question of right, honest, and clean living, he asked, “How can a horse-dealer be a Christian? He must lie to live. My business depends on it.” “Then,” I answered, “if that is so—though I doubt it—lose your business and save your soul.” Presently he rose to his feet, knelt in prayer, and cried, “My God, I will be an honest man,” and without any of our people pressing our views of Scripture—Heaven, Hell, the Sacraments, the Miracles of Christ, &c.—upon him, I learned that within a few days afterwards he was rejoicing in the God of the Bible, and in a God who had entered his otherwise wretched home and business life. The best way to the head is *viâ* the heart. A man’s character is of more concern than his beliefs. A student of the Aberdeen University put this question to me (he was troubled about his soul): “I want to believe, but I can’t. How can I trust God when I don’t believe in God?” I admitted that it seemed impossible, though I charged him, perhaps too dogmatically, with being the cause of his own wretched intellectual demoralisation, for he had informed me that he had been devouring, with the spirit of a glutton, all the literature destructive of faith in God that he could procure. We have no more right, I contend, to read or study what is detrimental to our spiritual life than we have to eat injurious or poisonous food. Let each man be his own judge. Next night my student friend remained to the close of my meeting. At the penitent form was a confirmed drunken



sot. "What am I to do with this man?" I asked my university friend. "He wants to give up the drink, but he says he can't. You can plainly see that it is damning his body and soul." "God only knows," he replied. "And yet," I suggested, "there is not a straw's difference between him and you. His sin is of the flesh; yours is of the mind." He acknowledged the justice of the comparison, and that night on the granite slab of his doorstep he knelt and cried, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief." I did not ask him to burn his infidel literature, but he afterwards told me that, in order to encourage his faith, he made the sacrifice, and when I last heard of him he was in New Zealand, and an elder of a Presbyterian Church. In truth, I believe, the chief reason why men do not believe in God, and in His Son whom He has sent, and in the possibility of walking in the favour of God day by day—in holiness, love, and purity—is because they will not submit to God's way of finding Him. This condition requires the humility of the child, the renunciation of sin, the mortification of the lusts of the flesh, and very often the loss of money and reputation, and with such a rush after the golden calf and the pleasures of society as there is at present, I am not surprised that so few, especially among the middle classes, are prepared to pay the price necessary for their salvation. I may be permitted to add another opinion, viz., that the faith of the nation is more than ever dependent upon the spiritual aggressiveness of the Church. With few exceptions the Churches do not go in for converting the people. It is not fashionable. It is a gradual work. It savours too much of revival, Moody and Sankey, Torrey-Alexander, and Salvation Army. And yet who will deny that saving souls is the essential and supreme work of the followers of Christ? As it is, the Churches



are becoming a cross between a club and a sanctuary ; and as it was in the first century so it may be in the twentieth—God will have to fall back upon some half-fanatic and raise up a people after His own heart from the riff-raff and wasters of the Gentile world. Let pastors and preachers and Salvation Army officers imitate the politicians in one respect. Mr. Chamberlain is the apostle of Tariff Reform. He may be right or wrong. That is not a point with me. But he has gripped an essential of success. He knows that he must convert the voters to his views. If he fails, his cause will collapse. If he succeeds, nothing can stop the realisation of his plans. Newspapers may spill oceans of ink over his heresies ; he goes on all the same. As Christians our business is to convert the publican and sinner—not condemn them ; and if they saw that that was really the Alpha and Omega of all our Christian effort, it would be hard indeed for them to kick against the pricks.

ALEX. M. NICOL,

Commissioner Salvation Army.

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It is a bad sign of a man when he dislikes to hear or think about the truth. If a man has wholly made up his mind to enjoy the baser pleasures of life, to continue to follow after some unrighteous means of making gain to spend his (or her) days in vanity, then the idea of a coming judgment and the call to a higher and better life will be very unwelcome. Such men will get rid of all thoughts of this kind as soon as possible ; or they will delude their minds by practising some formalities, so that they may continue in their sins unmolested by any sense of neglected duty. The prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi,

denounce this pretence of godliness as a refuge of lies, as untempered mortar, as spiritual unfaithfulness. It is a vain thing for a man to profess an orthodox faith in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, who will come to judge the world, while yet a man lives every day as if he did not believe it. But the test of the sincerity of a man's hope or faith in the truth is that he is led by it to live soberly, righteously, and godly.

19, Claremont Square.

JAMES C. RICHARDSON.

That modern science is incompatible with mediæval Christianity is one thing; that it is incompatible with a reasonable interpretation of Christ's personal teaching I do not believe. But the majority of scientific men, finding science and mediæval ideas incompatible, have in most cases either "kept their science and religion in water-tight compartments," or rejected religion altogether. Hence, science being temporarily in the ascendant, it is not surprising that many who are neither scientists nor theologians have ceased to regard religion as a sufficiently serious matter to allow it to have any practical influence on their lives. Science is supposed to lead to materialistic conclusions, and a well-known Cambridge professor told me the other day that it had quite done away with the idea of a future state. But what of the doctrines of evolution and the conservation of energy? Do they not imply that a life is neither more nor less than a single link in an endless chain, of vast importance as determined by those before, and as conditioning those coming after, but still only a link? This is the universal teaching of the East, and is, I believe, absolutely essential to the realisation of the earnest warnings of Christ, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Without a succession of lives the teaching of responsibility and

absolute justice becomes, so far as I can judge, simply a dead letter. Granted that Christ did not actually insist on the corresponding doctrine, why should He, when all those around Him already believed it? Whenever it was brought under His notice, as in the instances of John the Baptist and the blind man, He simply gave what explanations the case before Him required; but never repudiated the belief Himself. Besides, the New Testament doctrine of a future state is utterly perverted by the word "Heaven" (generally used in the plural and rarely in the singular, except where it means the sky) being usually translated in the singular. "Faith" I understand to mean a firm conviction of the truth of such axioms as water drowns and fire burns. If men once realise that it largely depends on themselves to make their next life what they make it in this (precisely as it largely depends on our actions to-day what our to-morrow is likely to be), then those who are sufficiently advanced to wish to improve themselves will be encouraged to do so. Science and religion were once identical, and I look forward to a time when each shall again supplement the other without any possible jealousy or contradiction between them.

W. F. K.

Permit me to point out that: (1) The Christian Church has ever recognised that there are tares amongst her wheat, and that she is militant here on earth, even to internecine warfare. (2) In one form or another she is ever interceding for those who profess and call themselves "Christians," that they may "hold the Faith . . . in righteousness of life." And (3) That Christ's words do not deny to a millionaire the truest Christianity.

Caister-on-Sea.

J. V. F.

The "calm and poignant modern pessimism" of which your correspondent "X" speaks is no modern thing at all. Ever since the time of Ecclesiastes, and, I doubt not, before that, men have been baffled and disheartened by the apparent impossibility of reconciling dogma and fact. Yet your correspondents notwithstanding, these men are few in numbers, and I feel sure the clergy do well to, as a rule, ignore their existence in the pulpit and preach to those who are not interested in the subject. The real stumbling-block to these people is the fact that they will not, or cannot, accept the condition that the Founder of Christianity laid down for those who would follow Him, "Except ye become as little children ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven." They will not, or cannot, humble their intellects to believe first, trusting they will after be able to prove; but would rather prove first and then believe. Christianity never was proved or believed that way. Nor, if you care to think out the matter, are many or any of the average man's beliefs. No sceptic ever was convinced by argument. Disputations are not the proper work of the Christian Church or her ministers. Her work is to preach her message to those who will hear and to minister to her children. To superior people who trust to their intellect alone the Gospel is likely ever to be, as it was to the Greeks of old, "foolishness."

EALING.

Personally, I (a country pastor) have found, along with a certain degree of vague doubt, a very general readiness to accept the broad, basal truths of the Christian faith; but also a very general neglect of religious observances, arising partly from a re-action against the foolish fuss often made about ceremonial trifles, but much more from the un readiness of "the natural man" to submit himself to what he



knows to be the necessary requirements of sincere Christianity. Some little time ago I had a fairly long talk with an intelligent mechanic, who told me that he regarded most of the Bible as consisting of "a sort of moral fairy tales." But, at the same time, he frankly owned that there was something very real about the life and sayings of Jesus Christ, something which laid hold of himself in an altogether wonderful way when he recalled bits of what he had learned as a boy. As for anything like Atheism, he said he had only to lie on his back in the woods on a spring day and to look up through the trees to the sky "to get all that fairly knocked on the head." So he sent his children to Sunday School, and was unmistakably affected when, on an occasion of domestic loss, I expressed the hope that he might, through Christ, by-and-by meet the lost one again. Farther than that I could not get him; but have still the impression that it was some consciousness of moral weakness, and not any very real doubt as to the grounds of a Christian's hope, that held him back. I observe that two of your correspondents quote Omar Khayyam, who is, I think, rather the fashion now among literary unbelievers. All one need say about him, however, is that his ideas were not new eight hundred years ago, and are certainly not more up-to-date to-day. As a re-action from the shocking crudities of the popular Mohammedan creed they were excusable enough; but John xvii. has in it light enough to shine away all Omar Khayyam's mists and darkness. Moreover, if I remember aright, his spiritual darkness lands him also in a lowered moral ideal. If any faltering Christians want their faith revived, they might do worse than make acquaintance with some of our Nonconformist village Bethels. With all their faults, most of these represent the self-sacrifice of, for the most part, plain working people whose hearts God



touched, and who knew no better way of acknowledging their gratitude to Him for all the comfort and strength they had found in the Gospel of His Son than by helping to build and to maintain these little sanctuaries for the continued preaching and teaching of the same Divine Truth which had led them into light, joy, and liberty.

Arundel.

EDWIN LEGG.

The question is not alone a modern one. The Apostle Paul at Athens had to meet a condition of mind precisely similar. Speaking to the Athenian philosophers (Acts xvii. 23), the Apostle acknowledges them to be religious, and to have many objects of worship, but amidst all this devotion was the altar with the inscription, "To the Unknown God." And, again, a greater than Paul, the Lord Christ Himself, speaking to the woman of Samaria, in answer to her query *re* worship, said, "Ye worship that which ye know not." May not an answer, then, to all the confusion and perplexity concerning religious belief to-day be summed up in the words, "Ignorance of God"? "Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship," says the Apostle, "Him declare I unto you" (and then he appeals to their reasoning faculties, made so much of to-day also). The proclamation of God concerning His Son (Rom. i. 3), who was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead, is for the "obedience of faith among all nations." Not the cavillings of faith, if we may coin such a phrase. And no one, of whatever social status, or race, or creed, who in simple faith bows—not even understanding it—to the majesty of this Divine proclamation, and obeys it, by receiving it as Divine truth, but "shall be illuminated" by the Holy Spirit with "the good tidings of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 4, R.V.).

The declaration of all the attributes of the Divine character was infinitely manifested at the Cross of Calvary, in the gift of "the beloved Son," and at the spoiled tomb, in that "God raised Him from the dead, and set Him on high, and gave Him glory." The heart's reception of and faith in this will alone satisfy all its hungerings, and work out, in the life of the one who receives it, that "true holiness" which one of your correspondents so rightly says "many are greatly longing after."

Richmond Hill, Surrey.

W. C. MORTON.

I, for one, feel that the grave charge which "Oxoniensis" has brought against our official Christianity is not only telling, but true. I would, in all humility, suggest to the Fathers of our Church, on the eve of the Church Congress, that they should study St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, and especially those words of his, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." But when we turn to the practical side of our popular Christianity to-day, what is it?—it is to take advantage of every action of our neighbour and to profit by them. It is to advance our own position by every available means, and especially to take advantage of the ignorance and weakness of others. It is to buy in the cheapest market and to sell in the dearest, with the necessary result of such a system to the weakest, swindling! In a word, it is a reversal of Christ's golden rule—it is not to do to others as we would be done by. Why is it that the old English honesty, when it used to be our glory and our strength—why is it that it has decayed so much of late years, and this hideous and shameful hypocrisy taken its place? It is, I venture to think, because we are forgetting whose we are and whom we serve. It is because we have been wanting to save our souls, not caring,

however, whether our souls were saved alive, or whether they were dead and rotten and damned within us. Christ has given us the one test by which we can tell true teachers from false. Was it "by their doctrine ye shall know them," as too often has been most fatally taught? Nothing of the kind. It was by "their fruits ye shall know them." Might I venture to draw attention to a little poem of James Russell Lowell's, entitled "A Parable"? At the least it will cause us to reflect upon the signs of the times :—

"Said Christ our Lord, 'I will go and see  
How the men, My brethren, believe in Me.'

Then said the chief priest, and rulers and kings,  
'Behold, now, the Giver of all good things ;  
Go to, let us welcome with pomp and state  
Him who alone is mighty and great.'

Great organs surged through arches dim  
Their jubilant floods in praise of Him ;  
And in church, and palace, and judgment-hall  
He saw His image high over all.

But still, wherever His steps they led,  
The Lord in sorrow bent down His head,  
And from under the heavy foundation stones  
The Son of Mary heard bitter groans.

'Have ye founded your thrones and altars, then,  
On the bodies and souls of living men ?  
And think ye that building shall endure  
Which shelters the noble and crushes the poor ?

'With gates of silver and bars of gold  
Ye have fenced My sheep from their Father's fold :  
I have heard the dropping of their tears  
In Heaven these eighteen hundred years.'

Then Christ sought out an artisan,  
A low-browed, stunted, haggard man ;  
And a motherless girl, whose fingers thin  
Pushed from her faintly want and sin.

## DO WE BELIEVE?

These set He in the midst of them,  
 And as they drew back their garment-hem,  
 For fear of defilement, 'Lo, here,' said He,  
 'The images ye have made of Me!'"

London, S.E.

H. MAYNE YOUNG.

The words of the late Mr. Spurgeon were, I believe :  
 "Throw the Bible over, and man is on a tempestuous sea  
 without a shore." I venture to say man derives far more  
 real happiness—even in this life—by accepting the  
 Scriptures and living accordingly than by rejecting  
 them ; and if, when he dies, they prove fallacious (for,  
 after all, it is a matter of faith), what has he lost ?  
 Nothing. He has, in the meantime, led the wiser and  
 so the happier life, and if his faith, as a true Christian,  
 is not misplaced, his gain is unspeakable.

London.

E. DE M.

We must distinguish between things that differ ; belief  
 and practice have always been at variance. If our obser-  
 vance of the ideal principles of the Sermon on the Mount  
 be taken as indicating the extent of our belief, there seems  
 no doubt that the inquiry would have to be answered in  
 the negative. But actions do not necessarily determine  
 belief, neither does failure to attain to the high standard  
 of Christian ethics necessarily imply the absence of it. I  
 would say men do believe in the ideals of self-sacrifice,  
 purity, &c., but the difference is in this, that they have  
 not the moral courage and the determination to give  
 expression to their belief. The difficulty is not to believe,  
 but rather to disbelieve. It must be easier to believe in  
 God and a future life than to disbelieve ; men cannot  
 believe that they die like dogs, and that death is the end  
 of everything. The question to my mind resolves itself,  
 not so much into Do we believe ? but, Are we indifferent ?

Chelsea.

W. J. B.

“How can we believe what we do not understand ; and even if we did, what would our faith be worth ?” Surely these words contain the secret of the inconsistencies pointed out. Religious faith is a gift of God—a knowledge of things unseen and incomprehensible to the unenlightened mind. Faith may be defined as a belief in an idea, on the truth of which the believer is prepared to stake his life. Most of us have this faith in some ideas ; some of us have it in the Divine birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, and it is only these that can profitably be called Christians, a term which “Oxoniensis” rightly describes as ambiguous. There are, of course, throughout the world many men living lives very nearly in accord with the principles of Christ who do not profess to believe in His incarnation, and there are more who profess to believe in His incarnation who live anything but Christian lives. These correspond closely to the Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites who were denounced as the greatest misleaders of the Jews ; but neither of these classes can be called Christians with any sense of accuracy. It is an error to suppose that we cannot believe what we do not understand. The infinitely great and the infinitely small are both incomprehensible to the human mind, but mathematicians not only believe in them, but employ them largely in their calculations and reasonings. If we had no faith in infinity, why write books about the Differential Calculus, or teach that parallel straight lines meet in the infinite distance, that points are infinitely small and lines infinitely narrow ? Most people believe that the world goes round the sun, but few could explain why, and most of those who could explain why will realise that they believed it long before they understood why. Probably if they had been put to the test, as Galileo was, before they understood, their faith would have failed. In the same



way belief in God is primarily a matter of instruction, but until that instruction is strengthened by personal experience and reason there is no faith worthy of the name, and a false profession of faith is the greatest stumbling-block to its real acquirement. It is this that leads to the idea that faith is professing to believe what one knows to be untrue, or, as the ancient Church writer quoted by "Oxoniensis" puts it, "*Credo quia impossibile.*" It is because the Churches insist on a profession of faith which must in most cases be false that they have lost all hold on thinking minds. When the human mind receives the gift of faith, it realises its saving power, but to insist on the profession of a creed as though belief were a voluntary act, to be undertaken at will by any human mind, is to lose sight of the fact that Jesus Christ Himself said that no man could believe in Him unless the Father drew him; and, further, that His directions to the rich young man who asked what he should do to inherit eternal life were to do his duty to his neighbour, and contained no reference whatever to theology. Those who read Prince Kropotkin's article in the *Nineteenth Century* for August, 1904, will find that even scientists are beginning to realise that Christ's gospel of mutual help is the true law by which God intends man to live and prosper, and that the theory of the survival of the fittest as a working principle is an invention of the Devil, by which he has for long deceived man to unhappiness and destruction. When thinkers, scientific and religious, succeed in spreading the realisation of this truth, we may begin to hope for the kingdom of God on earth.

London.

A. S. FLEMING.

The question raised by "Oxoniensis" may be answered very briefly as follows: Some believe and some do

not. If that reply is too concise, we may notice that "Oxoniensis" does not define whom he means by "we" except in his closing words: "I am speaking of the vast majority, the men and women of the world, of ourselves, in short, as an average mass. Do we believe?" He writes as being himself a believer, but a believer who is puzzled and frightened by the present state of things. But though there is much to sadden any believer who is a true "philanthropist," "Oxoniensis" and many others make the case more puzzling than it need be through confusion of thought. He asks, "Do we believe?" and proceeds to compare and contrast the ideals of Christ with the ideals of the world, and asks whether "the men and women of the world" really believe and admire the ideals of Christ. The religion of Christ Jesus influences the world in various ways, but the real power of that religion is only to be seen in the sincere believer who is not of the world, because Christ has called him out of the world. Many of those described by "Oxoniensis" are only counterfeit Christians—"tares," not "wheat." But we must beware of harsh judgments, for Christ Himself warns us that we may mistake the one for the other—wheat for tares, as well as tares for wheat. Even the truest Christians are not yet perfect Christians. They fall short of their own ideals; yet their ideals are imperfect, while Christ's ideals are perfect. These are ideals set before us by the perfect example for our good—standards by which we may test our own motives and conduct; but not standards by which we may claim merit, or condemn and reject our fellows, for Christ Jesus said: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." There is an awful amount of inconsistency and failure among Christians generally, and much need for repentance and of works worthy of repentance. But let us not think Christianity

a failure because of the failures of Christians, and certainly not because of the faults of "spurious imitations." Who considers bad money a sound reason for refusing good money, or for condemning the system of making and using coins? "Oxoniensis" raises another question: "How can we believe what we do not understand?" A very common question, but a very strange one from an educated, thinking man! Surely, "Oxoniensis" has learned something about gravitation; but can he "understand" it? What keeps him on earth in spite of the earth's rotation? He does not "understand" it, yet he does not chain himself to a tree or a rock to avoid an involuntary journey to the moon; nor does he hesitate to "believe" the prediction of eclipses for next year, although the earth is rushing through space at some one and a half million of miles a day, and only continues its circuit round the sun by virtue of "that mystery of mysteries," the attraction of gravitation; that "action at a distance" which "we do not understand"; or possibly some other kind of omnipresent energy which "we do not understand." The mysteries of a sensible New Testament Christianity are probably neither more, nor more puzzling, than the mysteries now taught in the name of modern science. Where is the man, learned or ignorant, who really believes only what he "can understand"? Let "Oxoniensis" and those who think with him consider with earnest sincerity the claims of Christ and the evidences of Christianity, and when that inquiry has led them to come "out of the world," let them earnestly take their part with Christ in His great work of saving "the world." There is plenty of work for all of them—first within, and then around.

Leicester.

E. SEELEY.

Your correspondent "Oxoniensis" in his truly remark-

able letter has opened a great subject, and none too soon ! His allusion to a Liverpool " Church Congress " interests myself much, as in 1869 I took a humble part in it, sandwiched in between the famous Mr. Mackonochie and another very High Church clergyman ; and the present Lord Halifax, I think, also joined in ; but after thirty-five years' interval and reflection I must confess I cannot see that any of us, upon one side or upon the other, said much that was of real importance. I could wish that " Oxoniensis " had been amongst us then, and that we could have discussed his letter. Yes, " Do we believe ? " is the vital question. It is not one merely of Church order and discipline, but, as touching the Church, next to one of Divine faith, it is one of faithfulness to the broad-minded Protestantism of our great Edwardian and Elizabethan reformers. It involves a national recognition of the Presbyterian element in the Church, as well as the Episcopalian. No amends having ever yet been made for the violent and unjust exclusion of the former from the Church in the reign of King Charles II. It involves the prompt and positive discontinuance of such stumbling-blocks as the public reading of that so-called Creed which (it has been well said) as regards its discussion of the mysterious Trinity and its damnable clauses, has made more unbelievers than it has ever made Christians ; and which, moreover, in conjunction with some few stereotyped assertions in other formularies of an offensive and provocative type—of no use whatever for enforcing the Church's doctrine, and easily removable without prejudice to the general meaning—are a fruitful source of difficulty to the Church in connection with the paucity of candidates for holy orders, and are driving many of the best of our youth, young men of true piety, young men of honour, into the ministry of



other Churches, because they cannot tolerate that the status and privileges of the Established Church shall be diverted from their proper use by any casuistical construction of the rubrics or formularies, so as to assimilate the Protestant to the Roman Catholic system. I, for one, feel deeply indebted to "Oxoniensis" for his opportune and valuable letter.

Kent.

CANTABRIGIENSIS.

The one thing that is expected of Christians is too often conspicuous by its absence. Where is the consistent life of the professing Christian? This is what the world expects to see; this is where the world is too often disappointed. Can we not, then, do something to roll back this reproach from our doors? Shall we not make our lives more in harmony with our professions? The Sermon on the Mount, which was the starting-point of this discussion, lies before us as our model. Christ gave it to us; in it is sketched out the Christian's character; there you can see what Christ wants, and if you do not find it portrayed in every professing Christian, that is no reason for blaming the system, but rather for looking at home to see how far you personally try to follow in the steps of our risen and ascended Lord. Do we believe? Yes; I am sure we do. Have you seen the follower of Christ die? Have you seen a Christian lose one dear to him or her by death? Then you can answer this question for yourself. Death is the great leveller; in his presence we are all equal; he cares for the person of no one, and there the true character comes out. Our belief, feeble as it may be sometimes, helps us, it is true, in this life, but, above all, it teaches us how to die. That, after all, is necessary; say what you will, you have to die some day. And this life is given for the purpose of preparing for that death. Use it,



then, for that purpose, and you cannot use it better than by putting your faith into practice. We, it seems, shall have many opportunities this winter of showing the Christlike qualities of self-sacrifice in helping the sufferings of the poor through want of employment. Let us do our best to cause people to believe more in Christianity as a living force and as a following of Him who founded it when they see us doing what we can in the Christlike spirit to help the needy and relieve the sick. Remember the words of St. James, the practical Christian of the New Testament: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

E. BASIL SPURGIN, Vicar of Sidcup, Kent.

Doubtless there are tens of thousands besides myself who can answer the question with an unequivocal and emphatic "Yes." Many, too, will have in their remembrance the last scenes on earth, when an honoured father or mother was, by the grace of God, enabled to say without a doubt or tremor, "Yea, though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me." And thank God, too, thousands of their children can as truly say, although it may be between sobs of bereavement, "We know whom we have believed, and that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him against that day"; and although we are sometimes inclined to say, "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief," we are fully persuaded "That neither life, nor death, nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." "For if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable."

Catford.

S. MORTIMER.

It seems to me that the question, "Do we believe?" is not sufficiently comprehensive. I prefer the Gospel inquiry, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith upon the earth?" To this I answer emphatically, "Yes!" Backed by the experience of forty years as a country and London clergyman, daily visiting persons of all positions, rich and poor, busy and indolent, sick and in health, in happiness and misery, under every condition of life, I am glad to express the sentiments of my heart that faith exists, and living faith, with the generality of people. I do not think the laxity in church-going proves unbelief; a careless indifference to public worship is a growing evil, and this may be attributed to the prevailing system in pressing for too much belief, but from this we are not to impute infidelity or scepticism. One learned theologian lately handled with improper freedom some of the fundamental truths of Christianity without producing any evil result, which argues strongly that "we do believe," and that the faith of the world is deeply rooted in the truth. We see this among our children in the face of undenominational education; we witness it with our poorest class, the casuals of London; we find it in the country cottage and in the confined habitations of Clare Market. There is always prominent a desire for the offices of religion, as much as there was fifty years ago. People hang to Christianity as the mainstay of their lives and their security in death.

J. J. H. S. PENNINGTON,

Rector of St. Clement Danes and Clare Market.

I am thankful to be able to believe that there is some answer to the terrible picture so well drawn by "Oxoniensis." We are very apt to judge of a man's body by his outward appearance. But do men, as a rule, carry their hearts or spirits upon their coat-sleeves? Is there

one man or woman of whom you can judge by the outward appearance of the acts of life? Can we enter into that secret chamber where the conscience stands before the invisible Creator and witness the sorrow and the anguish which He alone can see? When Naaman entered into the House of Rimmon to worship with his master, and bowed himself in the House of Rimmon, would not the outside observer have condemned him as a worshipper of Rimmon? And yet we know that, in secret, the Lord pardoned him for this thing. And so, though the outward appearance of the world may indeed raise the question of "Do we believe?" is it not well to consider that the answer to that question is entirely beyond our capacity, inasmuch as the answer lieth with Him who sees the hearts of men, and not the outward appearances by which we frail creatures are so apt to judge? Perhaps I might add, as an instance, the vast congregation of City men who gather at Bow Church at the one o'clock services. To look at them, who would believe that many of them have the instinct of faith? And yet they daily assemble, and on Tuesdays the church has scarcely standing room. Depend upon it that, in spite of the terrible picture so well drawn by "Oxoniensis," there probably never was a greater longing after true holiness of life than at the present time.

London, E.C.

HOPEFUL.

Your correspondent "Oxoniensis" asks, "How can we believe what we do not understand?" Do we "understand" love or beauty? Can reason account for the supreme value of honour and chastity? It is obvious that the only things of final interest or importance are just those things that we do not "understand." "*Omnia exeunt in mysterium*" is a saying with which "Oxoniensis"

will be familiar. The words of Tertullian, "*Credo quia impossibile est*," contain the root of the whole matter for those who can receive it. For the others—the vast majority—let me recommend the following passage from a great writer of our own day: "The mass of mankind must receive and hold these things as they daily receive and hold a thousand other things—laws, customs, traditions, the grounds of common moralities, &c.—by faith; their real apprehension in such matters extending for the most part only to the discernment of the reasonableness of so receiving and holding them."

The White House, Amersham.

PAUL ENGLAND.

"Do we believe?" Are we not, as usual, playing with words? The essential to belief in the sense used is a truth. At the outset, therefore, we are blocked with the question, What is truth? This was left unanswered to Pilate, and is not likely to be revealed to the merely inquisitive. The world's knowledge is a nearer and nearer approach thereto, but the final perfection is still far distant. Science and religion are both seeking the same end, and come closer and closer together as they near this end; but truth, perfect truth, as far as we at present know, is behind the veil. Therein lies the faith of the Church and the eternal hope of many. To earnest inquirers and waverers alike I would suggest, "Go work in My vineyard." The glorious promise is not limited to a full eight-hours' day. Faith will come as knowledge increases.

Sydenham.

FRANK TAYLOR.

Though not an Oxonian, I yet profess to be a Christian, and must most decidedly answer to the question, Do I believe? certainly not in the Christianity of "Oxoniensis." I do not believe in "an awful world that is to come," as



does "Oxoniensis." If I did, it would follow that I believed in an awful God. I have no such faith, yet I claim to be just as true a Christian as "Oxoniensis." "Faith is not of much use unless it supplies motives for action," he says. That is quite true without Christ ; but with Christ it is wholly false, for a Christian faith is absolutely negative unless it warns us that we have no motive power for good of our own, and never will have in this world. And it is also absolutely useless unless it enables Christ to supply us with the said motive power, not for our justification, but for His honour and glory, so that any good actions done in us may shine forth to His glory, whose unprofitable servants we are. "A religion must necessarily issue in morality," he says—I presume he means in this world. This requires no argument. The Christian religion has existed some two thousand years, and has not yet done so ; it does not require argument when the facts are before us. "Oxoniensis" gives his case away when he quotes the ideals given in the Sermon on the Mount. They are ideals for us to love, not to follow in detail. No one man or woman except Christ Himself ever followed them all. Such parts of these ideals as we can follow are those which our Church denotes to the newly-purified in heart, after the Holy Communion, when we pray to our Father through Christ to assist us with His grace that we may do all such good works as He has prepared for us to walk in. "Oxoniensis" is absolutely wrong when he asks us to believe in only one of two ideals. It is absolutely necessary for us to believe first in the world's ideal and know what it means. Then it is necessary for us to renounce that as our ideal, and of our free will set before ourselves the ideal of Christ, trusting to Him for strength to carry out such good works as He wants us to do ; in fact, such as He has "prepared for us to walk in," and fruit of some



kind we shall certainly bear, though it may be only 30 per cent. of the full amount possible, and that at the eleventh hour. This religion of trial by moral worth is the heresy of the age. What was Christ's first act after the Sermon on the Mount? The healing of the lepers. I as a Christian believe thus :—

First, in Satan as a personal power (a rebellious power) ;

Secondly, in my own nature being descended from Satan (therefore rebellious also) ;

Thirdly, in a God of Love, who has devised means for me to escape from rebellion into free-will service by the Spirit of Christ ;

Fourthly, in a future State in which I shall be able to live in my own strength originally derived from Him.

This, I take it, can justly be claimed as Christianity as much as that of "Oxoniensis."

#### "WHEAT AND TARES."

There is far more faith on the earth than "Oxoniensis" seems to have any idea of. Elijah, when he thought he was the only faithful man left, was quietly informed that there were seven thousand others. Besides, he doth protest too much, and goes beyond the meaning of Christ's words when he says, "Think of a millionaire calling himself a Christian in the face of the text," &c. Let him read St. Paul's instructions to the rich in the First Epistle to Timothy. It is one thing to have riches and use them wisely, and another to trust in them and put them in the place of God. It is the latter course that one has to beware of. He assumes too much when he airily asserts that hardly any one believes seriously in a Hell of everlasting torments nowadays. "Fire" may be and undoubtedly

is used in a figurative sense ; but then it is figurative of something equally awful, and that it is everlasting is plainly stated.

Cavendish Square, W.

EDINBURGENSIS.

An answer to your question may, I think, be partly obtained by doing as a literary friend of mine did about two years ago. He ascertained the religious views of each of the first two hundred male adults met by him, and found fifty-six of them to be unbelievers ; proportion 28 per cent. Some twenty years earlier he made a similar experiment, when the sceptics came out at only 13 per cent. But such results might be influenced by locality, and therefore be unreliable when dealing with small figures.

Southampton.

AN OXONIAN.

The most momentous question of all ages doubtless is raised in a forcible manner by the letter of "Oxoniensis." His assertions that "Our Christianity would seem to be a splendid hypocrisy," and that "the ordinary, worldly life is a practical scepticism," while they supply an answer to his initial question, "Do we believe?" do no injustice to the majority in Christendom. Yet all men, by their actions, show that they trust, and therefore believe in some one, notwithstanding the profession which many make that they believe only what they see. Who among the unregenerate sons of Adam does not believe in self, in some measure, however prone to failure he may be? When his wrongdoings disturb his conscience, does he not promise himself he will not offend again, yet sooner or later falls? And which of the sceptics does not show that he has faith in his fallible fellow-men, though he rejects the infallible? Do they not all continually trust their precious lives to the care of engine-drivers, sailors,

&c., without suspecting either the power or ability of those men to keep them safe? Trusting in man, however, is not the faith of the true Christian, but rather the reverse. Those who have real faith in God, and who know their Bible, are not puzzled by such inquiries. They expect this age to end in apostasy, and they realise that many matters are really in the alarming state which is implied by your correspondent. I would add that regeneration is, of course, necessary to a full understanding of these matters, as it was to Nicodemus, who, though most learned in the letter, understood nothing profitably until the Master in twenty-one verses (John iii.) made it clear to him, and there the answer will be found to the all-important question, "What are we to believe?"

London.

W. P.

I was brought up a member of the Church of England, and my children were baptized and confirmed; not that I imagine these observances important, but so that, should they on attaining years of discretion think fit to embrace the "faith" according to the Church of England, they should have no obstacles of my construction to negotiate. It is now some thirty years since, confounded by its chaotic mysticism and the insurmountable difficulties of its teaching, I left the Church of England. During that period I have tried to discover for myself some simple "faith," one not repugnant to common sense, and which I could conscientiously accept. What is the result of my labour? I find I believe in one God only, who is to me a friend, long-suffering and of great kindness, by whom this planet, all appertaining thereto, and the organisation requisite for their very "being" have been evolved; that evolution is proceeding, that the wonderful progress of science is one of the purposes of this power I call God.

I believe in the immortality of the soul, and, ergo, in a future existence of some sort somewhere. I believe in the efficacy of direct prayer to this one God, *i.e.*, prayer without any intermediary whatsoever ; I am convinced of this, and my conviction is based on the evidence of my own personal experiences. I consider myself a free agent, but am also aware that there exist certain immutable laws, viz., those of cause and effect, and I fully recognise that as I sow so also must I expect to reap. For forms and creeds I care not one jot. I find my beliefs sufficient for my needs, and when I wander among the hills in the midst of which my home is placed, or by the tide which ebbs and flows below it, I am not distracted by endeavouring to persuade myself that round pegs were made to fit square holes, or that by skilful manipulation two plus two can be made to equal five.

Wales.

ANOTHER M.A. (OXON).

A brief correction of some of the inaccuracies of "Oxoniensis." I agree with his comment on the shadowy platform adopted in religious conferences, as postulating a non-existent consensus ; and of the ambiguity of the term "Christian." And gladly do I acknowledge the unobtrusive tone of (so-called) scepticism. But "Oxoniensis" makes a great mistake in confusing Faith with Creed—a creed "formulating dogmas." So do many others, to their hurt. And he proceeds to assume a "religious assumption" concerning the "state of trial" in this life, the "probationary sphere," which forms no essential part of Christ's teaching, though he incidentally appealed to the well-known truth that "a tree is known by its fruits." The "realisation of justice" will be dominated by a triumphant mercy and the power to winnow the good fruit of a life out of a heap of chaff,

with a result that will surprise even the objects of this cleansing. His description of "Heaven" as the "triumph of obscure virtue and the equality of all" before the One Father is excellently well deduced from our Master's teaching; but why add the alternative, which has no such foundation? Again, Christians are not committed to the foolish saying, "*Credo quia impossibile*," but rather to the responsibility involved in the words, "Why do ye not of yourselves judge that which is right?" Faith is "*fides*"—obedience, loyalty—an act of self-repressing will, not of mental gymnastics. Hence the "saving faith" is that of one who "willeth to do God's will"; just as the motto of Christ's life was "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." But "Oxoniensis" desiderates more signs of our acceptance of the "reversal of our worldly standards." This spirit works unseen, often unknown; and all attempts to give demonstrations of it are in vain. So may a man be a good swimmer when in the water, but on dry land he cannot prove it; nor can he reverse the rules of gravitation and the methods of locomotion, or act as if he were in the other element. "Oxoniensis" seems to have fallen into the error corrected by Christ's words, "Render unto Cæsar," &c. To his condemnation of rich men, politicians, and "leaders of society," I will only submit the advice, "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

Kensington.

DELTA.

I have read with great interest the skilful and temperate letter of "X," and am in such fundamental agreement with him that I am afraid I shall do little more than restate his conclusions. But I would ask if he is wholly consistent in his account of the "tragedy of unbelief"? The current dogmas seem to be abandoned by certain thinking men either because (1) the truths they point to



are not, in their view, adequately enough expressed by such dogmas, but are clothed in too symbolic a form to bring a full satisfaction ; or (2) the dogmas held hitherto unquestioningly are suddenly overturned by the arguments—good or bad—of a rationalism which does not advance beyond the point of view of pure physical science, and to whose conclusions they themselves are unable to apply any higher than a purely scientific category ; among these, with all respect, I would be inclined to place those who acquiesce in the phenomenalism of Mr. Herbert Spencer ; or because (3) their own lot in life—their own “temperament or the unhappiness they have found”—belies the optimistic convictions of their former religion, and they fall into a pessimism which is all the more poignant as the very things that have made them hope before are now twisted to the service of despair (compare the sonnet quoted by “X”), while they may be unable as yet rationally to justify either the one or the other. Now I think it is only to the third class that “X’s” words on the tragedy of unbelief would apply ; and the tragedy here does not really lie in their unbelief at all, for this unbelief is only an effect and not a cause of their pessimism ; and the ordinary preaching that strikes merely at their lack of belief will not help them, for it will not touch the root of their trouble, but will only (I might say) be piling fuel on a fire that is extinguished, when the remedy—if there be a remedy at all—lies, perhaps, in raking out the ashes and beginning anew. The scientific rationalist would certainly smile in pity if he were called unhappy through his lapse from his childish beliefs ; while the first class is not one of pessimists at all, for theirs is “the eternal idealism of countless minds which can frame to themselves no definite belief.” It is that they find their “eternal” optimism trammelled by the inevitably exclusive and

particular nature of a definite creed that they try to work out an idealistic view of the world without such aid. I am not concerned whether such an attempt be successful or not, or how far successful it be—but it need hardly be said that such a “scepticism towards all the systems of all the sects,” which is an attempt (however imperfect) to breathe a larger air, will not make them unhappy. “X” asks for a “new formula to express again the living faith of one great Church,” held by such who believe in what is really a “Divine interpretation of things.” But is it not the essence of such a faith that no formula, old or new, can fit it, and is it not in its very nature the negation of a definite creed? Such idealism is, perhaps, too impalpable for the multitude, who love to think in images, and who would not welcome the “new formula,” even if it were possible. I cannot see that a perfect spiritual union of such men and the idealists could be easily brought to pass, nor how—nor even why—the present way of looking for truth under two distinct forms, the dogmatic or symbolic and the undogmatic or idealistic, should be changed. Men fall away from the Church more and more, but is not such a falling away inevitable? It is not the fault of the Church as such, nor could the Congress much mend matters; men will seek their own salvation, and the modern way of seeking is more complex than the mediæval; but does such a method imply a decay of “belief,” in the larger sense of the word, I wonder?

“ALTER OXONIENSIS.”

Do we believe? Undoubtedly many of us do, and many do not. But of those that do (and this is what it seems to me that your correspondents have overlooked) the majority have, probably in the words of St. Paul, “believed in vain.” There are many people who sincerely believe the

great doctrines of Christianity, and yet do not practise them in their daily lives. Some of these have not attempted to do so ; others have tried and so far miserably failed, either because they lack strength of purpose, or because, do what they will, circumstances are almost too much for them. They have, perhaps, lived their lives with people who are notoriously irreligious, for whom the truth of God and the love of Christ are merely things to be scoffed at, and in addition to this they have scarcely come into contact with any powerful religious influence. For these people to live as if they believed is, indeed, difficult ; in fact, one might almost talk of the tragedy of belief as well as of the "tragedy of unbelief." And how different their lot might be could they but meet frequently with one person capable of setting them an example of how to live the true Christian life in all its nobleness and simplicity ! That such people exist is unquestionable ; nor are they an altogether insignificant minority, although they may not be over-numerous. I cannot agree with your correspondent, who says that the very fact that people are so ready to discuss theological matters is a proof of their being really religious—in fact, more so than formerly. The great majority of people, whether they are churchgoers or not, are far more interested in their own worldly concerns than in the condition of their souls.

London, S.W.

M.

It is clear to even the drowsiest mind that there must be reasons for and causes at the bottom of prevailing unbelief. One of these is clearly the ever-growing struggle for mere existence, which seems to exact every spark of energy from a body whose resources are only too limited. Another, the rush and roar of life, the ridiculous throat-cutting, energy-and-brain-wasting competition, without

which—one would presume—business can hardly be done. “Where are the good old times,” some ask, “when the little man, whether tradesman or farmer, could not only calmly earn a living, but lay by for the inevitable rainy day or a possible old age?” Yet another of these reasons is probably the growing love of pleasure and ostentation, when every one must equal, if not excel, his neighbour. Another, perhaps, the very exclusive, highly respectable, magnificently dressed gatherings that meet in equally magnificently adorned edifices for public worship; wherein the struggler, the poor clerk, mechanic, poorer musician, artist, or actor feels no right to intrude, and who quickly falls from a first transient resentment against undeserved snubbing into a fatal indifference, mingled with a laudable British independence, “We’re not going where we’re not wanted!” Hence the deplorable ignorance in spiritual concerns among a powerful body—the lower middle class. These and other causes allow no interest in higher aims, and above all no leisure for the contemplation of spiritual things; the material is so very prominent, so palpably essential, so obviously a reality, and its demands so absorbingly exacting, that neither inclination, brain, nor strength is left for beliefs in an unseen. To say that this present state of materialism is happiness, or even conducive to happiness, let alone holiness, would be to state a glaring untruth. Man is cursed—or blessed—with an insatiable thirst that never attains repletion, more truly that never yet was quenched with earth’s best treasures; for give him what you will, fill his coffers, satisfy his most ardent ambitions, fulfil his wildest dreams, gratify every carnal appetite, and still that insatiable dragon—the mortal—cries out for more. It is here that faith steps in, and in its spiritual grasp of the unseen and illimitable finds a perfect peace, an eternal, exhaustless mine that nothing



material has ever equalled or revealed. Who so happy as he who owns a certain anchor in every danger and emergency, an omnipotent helper in the hour of distress and mortal agony, a stronghold for time, a home for eternity ; who every night can close his eyes in heavenly peace, convinced that if he wake no more on earth a blest, eternal future is his, a place in the heart of Love ? As we do not obey to any very visible extent, it is clear we do not believe, for if we believed we should as naturally obey as a drowning man stretches out his hand to grasp the reliable rope tethered to a still more reliable raft.

CLIFTON GRIFFITHS.

Orthodoxy is crumbling on its foundations ; so-called theology is rejected by the majority of thinking minds ; but, to my mind, it would seem that the kingdom which the Divine Master came on earth to establish is, as evidenced by the unrest which has laid hold upon the minds of men, endeavouring more and more to make itself felt. But the teachers, the leaders, the so-called exponents of religion, have to ask themselves the plain question, put so forcibly by your correspondent "Homo," "Do we now, have we at any time, acted in the spirit of Christ ?" "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." "Homo" characterises the "sweet impossible counsels" of the Sermon on the Mount as ideals, and, further on, he delivers himself of the opinion that probably these ideals will never be realised. Should we not rather regard these ideals as destined in the counsels of eternity to be realised ? Creeds and dogmas, as he truly urges, will not even help us to approximate thereto ; but, surely, the Christ within, working by the operation of the Spirit of the Father, should tend, and will ultimately tend, more and more to their realisation. I, for one,



believe that, spite of the evil rampant amongst us, religion—real, worthy of the name—will very gradually, but surely, lead men onward and upward into the paths that make for righteousness.

Lewisham.

N.

So far as I understand it, "belief," or the acceptance of a statement as true, comes to us in three ways: (1) By demonstration; (2) by authority; (3) by intuition. The second I dismiss as not bringing belief in reality but only a sort of conditional assent; the first is implicitly a part of the third. By intuition I mean the power we have of instantly recognising the truth of a statement although incapable of any proof, and it is this power which is the Divine portion of every human being—the soul itself, in fact. These intuitive acts constitute in my opinion true belief and true faith. As an example of my meaning, take that epigrammatic commandment of Christ's, "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." Instantly one's assent to it is given, and reflection only shows more and more clearly the tremendous import of it; stupendous as it may seem, it sums up the whole law of Morality. My answer to your question would be, "Yes, we do believe" the basic and fundamental truths, whether taught by Buddha, Plato, or Christ, whose teaching is the summation and the idealisation of that of all the noble men who preceded Him. "Oxoniensis" compares the actualities of the world with the ideals, and naturally finds great discrepancy, much to be deplored. Now, I cannot share this feeling; the question we should ask is, Whether the general movement, morally, is upwards or downwards compared with that of, say, 3,000 years ago. The Bishop of London says (and I agree) upwards. That is the vital fact, because, although the progress may be slow, the time

required for the evolution of a perfect humanity compared with the time we have already existed must be very great indeed. I am of opinion that the real question we are all asking is not, "Do we believe?" but, "Why does our belief not influence our conduct?" to answer which is another matter.

London.

GEO. W. GREEN.

I am myself one of those who "are not conscious hypocrites, but who attend services with pleasure, sing hymns with unction, and hear sermons with joy, from habit." Yet my answer to the great question is emphatically "Yes." We do believe, but the common fault is that we do not exercise our faith sufficiently—the faith which gives us "power with God." We are not, as a rule, sufficiently wideawake to put it to the proof as often as we might. It is indeed a great question, and the most devout believers among us are sometimes in the greatest danger of lapsing into unbelief. Our Lord, on His earthly ministry, had eleven faithful followers, who daily conversed with Him, and witnessed His miracles. These men declared their readiness to follow Him, if needs be, to the death; and what was the answer? "Do ye now believe? Verily the hour cometh, yea, is even now come, when ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone. . . ." I quote this passage because it shows how every man's faith is tried to the very utmost; and that only God knows the true and final answer to the question, "Do we believe?"

London.

A. G. CHRISTMAS.

Unless your correspondent wishes to charge the members of the Congress with the hypocrisy of disbelief in the tenets of the Church to which they profess to belong, it is

impossible to see any special connection between the Congress and his letter. "Do we believe?" Some of us do, some do not, and some profess a belief which their practice contradicts. From the contemplation of this latter class "Oxonienensis" appears to derive his pessimistic opinion of religious morality. This class he regards as conterminous with "the vast majority . . . ourselves as an average mass," and he emphasises their "splendid hypocrisy" by comparing their "worldly ethics" with the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount. In the first place, it may be said that very few men would dare to claim for themselves that vast experience of life and of religious life on which alone the sweeping generalisations of your correspondent could be based. Moreover, to prove his case by reference to "the millionaire, the politician, and the smart leaders of society," and then to apply the results to the "vast majority," is not a legitimate mode of argument. In the second place, it seems doubtful whether "Oxonienensis" has grasped the principles of the Sermon on the Mount in their entirety. It by no means follows, for instance, from the text which he quotes, that no millionaires can be Christians, or that their Christianity would be any more effective were they forthwith to distribute their millions among the lower classes, with the object of reducing themselves to apostolic poverty. Why, again, should he reject the anthropomorphic Hell, and proceed to suggest a no less anthropomorphic Heaven, where "the poor slavey is the social equal of her mistress"? That numbers of professing Christians should contradict their profession by their practice is undoubtedly a sight as sad as it is common. But to assert that the vast majority are hypocrites of this kind is to make a statement which requires infinitely more evidence for its support than

the impressions of one individual or his experience of one class of society.

Liverpool.

H. J. C.

This correspondence opens up a great opportunity for an appeal to our countrymen, ere it be too late, on behalf of a stricter observance of the Lord's Day. Side by side with excellent letters upon the apparent decline of professed Christianity there appears an account of the Dean of Bristol's sermon, in which he strongly deprecates this twentieth-century Sunday desecration. The late Archbishop Benson often pointed out that it was the upper classes—those who did not work—who were most in fault in the non-observance of Sunday. Men who work all the week know how necessary it is to leave one day in the week for rest. The Jews have preserved to us the theory, if not the practice, of a day of immunity from labour. Christians appear upon the world's arena with their one consecrated day. Constantine—just having joined the Christian Church—proclaims, "Let all labour cease on the venerable Sunday." Under Edgar and Guthrun the laws stated, "If any one engage in Sunday marketings let him forfeit the chattel; if a lord oblige his slave to work on a festival, let him pay the fine." And all through the history of Christian life the same principle holds, "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day." I am truly convinced that Christianity, Christian principles, the Christian code of morals, the Christian hope in God will cease to hold us in that firm grip with which the Christian world of old was bound so long as we tacitly allow our Lord's Day to be treated in any other way than as a day to be dedicated to Him. If I cease to commemorate the Lord's resurrection on the Lord's Day I

cease to be a Christian, and ceasing to be a Christian I shall see no great harm in following my own natural inclinations. Marriage and the dignity of parentage will become nothing to me. Questions of white slavery here and elsewhere will be of no interest to me ; my callousness will be but the outcome of my want of Christian principle. I have lived in the East, I have heard the oft-repeated proverb, "No Sunday East of Suez," and I have added, "therefore no Christianity." I have found it so to a great extent, and I maintain that, in deploring the state of professed Christian society, we must look to the source of the deflection from the old principles of truth and righteousness, and earnestly appeal to our countrymen to strive to bring back to us that sober, godly day of reverence and thankfulness for the blessings of Christianity.

ARTHUR H. MANNING.

St. John the Baptist's, Tilbury Docks.

We believe far more in God than would appear from the moral condition of the world. The poor, except the extremely ignorant, believe in an Almighty Father, a Saviour, and in a better and happier life to come. Most of us do so, or we could scarcely endure life. But do we hear from the pulpit the plain teaching that justifies our faith ? That God has made man for Himself, and that the utmost need of every human being is conscious fellowship with Him. In all religion character is the aim and goal. In the Old Testament God spake by the prophets ; in Christ He sets before us the perfect ideal. Christ's revelation of God is Love, and Love works incessantly in behalf of the beloved. Almighty Love called us into being for the development of a God-like character which in itself implies a condition of perfect happiness. If we fail to



win this character here, if we disregard the teaching of the Holy Spirit, then, like Dives, we must improve elsewhere through suffering. We are not told, as we ought to be, that the quality of our soul, *i.e.*, our character, decides our position and environment after death. If this were understood our greatest dread would be sin. But the task is difficult; the loud voices of the world claim our attention; we do not realise our high calling as servants of God, and the lower self too often prevails. Every day is set before us the choice of good or evil, and our actions result in the sum total of character which shall place us among the righteous or the wicked, each in our own degree, and each with the hope of further progress and improvement. "I have the keys of Death and of Hell," says Christ. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

H. E. H. AVA CAMPBELL.

Gibliston, Colinsburgh, Fife.

Did not Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes many years ago, in his "Professor at the Breakfast Table," lucidly express the position in the following words: "Can any man look round and see what Christian countries are now doing, and how they are governed, and what is the general condition of society, without seeing that Christianity is the flag under which the world sails, and not the rudder that steers its course?"

J. C. BURLEIGH.

8, Plynlmmon Terrace, West Hill, Hastings.

"W. F. K.," in your issue of to-day, says, "A well-known Cambridge professor told me the other day that science had quite done away with the idea of a future state."

There have been in our generation, and still are, Cambridge professors who would emphatically deny this. "When I was at Cambridge," writes George Romanes, who, after much and long perplexity, found his way back to the faith of Christ, "there was a galaxy of genius in the mathematical department of science emanating from that place such as had never before been equalled. And the curious thing in our present connection is that all the most illustrious names were ranged on the side of orthodoxy. Sir William Thomson (now Lord Kelvin), Sir George Stokes, Professors Tait, Adams, Clerk-Maxwell, and Cayley, not to mention a number of lesser lights, such as Routh, Todhunter, Ferrers, &c., were all avowed Christians" ("Thoughts on Religion," by George Romanes, p. 137).

Fenny Compton.

AUDI ALTERAM PARTEM.

"What do we believe?" If the clergy had shorter services, short hymns and tunes in which the congregation could join, and, finally, if they gave short sermons, without repetition, with a few practical lessons, then, and only then, would the masses enjoy the service, attend in their thousands, and accept the Gospel in all its simplicity, and probably carry out—as far as they could—the high ideals mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. Instead, we have fifteen or twenty prayers said in a droney tone, hymns from thirty to sixty-four lines sung to melancholy tunes, and lastly, a sermon of fifteen to forty-five minutes' duration, touching on all subjects, from Genesis to Revelation, with a few remarks on current events, with no particular lesson for the laity. With what result? Small congregations, dislike of the Church or any other service. If we had improvements in these matters we should not hear so much about "What do we believe?"

Worksop.

WORKSOPIAN.

My firm conviction is that we as a nation have done away with all the good old simple, thorough religion and ideas, and have tasted something of the Continental love for pleasure, and, blinded, are rushing on and on to the whirlpool of decay and destruction awaiting us ; and some hesitate and cry " Halt ! " to wonder where we are, what we are, what, if we believe at all, do we believe in, and what it all means. No one can say that, as a nation, we are the same as we were twenty-five years ago even ; from Parliament downwards I maintain we are suffering from some mysterious canker in the character, life, and conduct. We have ourselves to blame for all this. Instead of the cry, " Give peace in our time, O Lord," we want to be a military nation, and talk lightly of conscription, brushing aside the remaining, " For none other fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God," and in our stupefying pride and folly think we are what we are not. Give us a religion that appeals to our sense of higher and nobler things than we have offered us to-day. Who cares a brass farthing for " My Lord Bishop of So-and-So," or the parish " priest," if those men's lives are not lived in humble, out-and-out sincerity to their Creator and Redeemer, and if they pander to please any one and every one rather than the One ? I believe the majority of earnest-thinking people of the present time still want the good old characteristics of the Englishman, and I agree with your correspondent, " Hopeful," that " there probably never was a greater longing after true holiness of life than at the present time." If not, then let the nation cheer itself (but " even in that laughter the heart will be sorrowful "), and let it work in its own ways and in the sight of its eyes (which are of the species that " see not "), but remember that for all these things God will bring it into judgment (Eccles. xi. 9).

Kensington, W.

A. A. L.

I should like to ask those in authority who have taken up the discussion whether the time has not arrived for a clearer and franker statement both of the grounds and objects of Christian belief. No doubt it is illegitimate to infer the truth of a doctrine from the subjective satisfaction which it affords, for the process rests on a gratuitous theological assumption. Nevertheless, in association with actual historic evidence, this form of argument may readily acquire a value quite legitimate in kind and incalculable in degree. I heard the late Dr. W. B. Carpenter on one occasion affirm that the imaginative impulse and sympathetic appreciation of men of science led them to formulate and accept the doctrine of evolution, while its verifying facts were yet unclassified. Of course they did. It was the necessary imaginative leap, the formative process of thought, which in matters of science always precedes verification, but which proves the innate power of man—individually in conception, collectively in appreciation—to transcend fact in the search for truth. But this same imaginative impulse, this formative process of thought, which seizes upon facts and shapes them to its will, may surely operate in the sphere of religion, where subsequent verification is impossible. The fact of its operation is unquestionable ; yet natural and inevitable as this is, it is regarded both from the Christian and non-Christian standpoint as introducing an element of uncertainty and falsehood into the sphere of its operation. Is this really the case ? I would venture, earnestly, to suggest to those upon whom devolves to-day the defence of Christianity the need of determining whether this subjective element is the weakness or the strength of the faith they defend. It is an element which they are bound to recognise, and which they will seek in vain to disengage. It remains, therefore, to be considered if it is not itself an evidential factor—if it

is not the contribution to Christianity of the formative principle of the universe, to which the historic facts furnish only plastic matter. Such a consideration may lead them to base the faith on a broader and securer ground than that of mere phenomenal verity.

Green Lanes, N.

FRED. W. FORD.

Your correspondent "Homo's" contention that "virtue is its own reward," and a sufficient one to ensure a good life, is refuted by all human experience. We know the ancient philosophers, who maintained that virtue was sufficient for itself, produced no effect whatever upon ancient morals, and that their own were not always unimpeachable. This theory is also opposed to the whole tenour of Scripture, which everywhere speaks of the promised reward and holds it up as a legitimate motive for action. It is remarkable, and must be a comfort to many, that the age of scepticism which is now upon us is itself a proof of the Divinity which it denies, for only He, to whom the future is as the past, could have predicted it, as He does in the solemn words, "When I come again shall I find faith upon the earth?"

Inverness Terrace, Bayswater.

F. W. C.

Those who attend Church Congresses are earnest believers, and need not to discuss the foundations of their faith. "Oxoniensis" quotes the old saying, "*Credo, quia impossibile*," and he asks, "How can we believe what we do not understand?" The answer to the question is surely a simple one. "Faith" means "taking anything on trust," and we Christians take God's statements "on trust," just because we find it "impossible" to explain or fathom those statements. My doctor sends me medicine; I have not the least idea how or why the medicine acts on



my liver, or my lungs, or my heart; but I take the mysterious restorative "on trust." I believe the doctor; I take him on trust because I cannot understand the nature of his remedies. That is surely why we say, "*Credo, quia impossibile.*" My ignorance leads me to trust my God. The writer next alludes to the Sermon on the Mount. The religion of Jesus Christ as taught in the Sermon on the Mount is one thing, the religion of the men and women of this world is quite another thing. It is the constant aim of the Christian preacher to show his hearers the awful difference that exists between what the men and women of this age actually are, and what they ought to be. Jesus Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, holds up a pattern, a model, at which all His followers should aim. The millionaire, the politician, the sensualist, the smart leaders of fashion all go dead against the teaching of Jesus Christ. As "Oxoniensis" very truly says: "The ordinary, worldly life is a practical scepticism—when it is not a worship of Baal." People, as a rule, do not believe. More's the pity. Ever since the world began there has been a terrible gulf between profession and practice. That gulf exists now.

Vicarage, Bromsgrove.

E. V. H.

As to the question, Why do not believers in Christianity live, in all its fulness, the Christlike life? I would say that all such, if not mere nominal believers, desire earnestly so to do, and when men cavil and sneer at the professing Christian's inconsistencies they forget, for one thing, that every man is really two men, or, rather, that there are two selves in every one of us—the better self and the baser self. Even the great St. Paul, sincere believer as he was, recognises this in himself, and admits and deplores the hated inconsistencies

of his life, which yet was a noble one to the end, and one that strove to be a faithful copy of his Master's perfect life. But, I ask, in spite of these things, Is our Christianity "a splendid hypocrisy"? It certainly is not if the believer aims at living up to the Christian ideal, though he may and must come far short of achievement. To such a one earnest failure is, after all, success, at any rate compared with the life and aims of the man who "lets himself go." And I maintain, further, that "the splendid hypocrisy" will stand the test of being judged by its fruits, small and blighted though these be in comparison with what they might be were man less imperfect; for to this "splendid hypocrisy" we nevertheless owe, either directly or indirectly, such blessings as the abolition of slavery, the existence of hospitals, and of almost every other philanthropic institution or beneficent law!

Burghfield, Ryde, I.W.

E. A. B. BOCKETT.

The past fifty years have seen many shiftings of belief, partly due to the general spread of education and the marked advance of scientific knowledge, but none the less so to a desire to discard the severity of the dogmas which reflect the inner life of the seventeenth century—an age of unrest, repressive measures, and severe theology! Hence belief—that is, religious belief—is in an unsettled state, which time alone can calm. But in the midst of this confusion there is a settled order which "Oxoniensis" seems incapable of appreciating. The charge of "Oxoniensis" against the "divines and devout laymen" who are to meet at Liverpool shows how little he knows of their aims and aspirations. He has sketched for them a colourless programme of ritual, Biblical interpretation, and ecclesiastical discipline. They have sketched for

themselves a programme which embraces all the great problems of the age, such as "the pulpit and business men," which will open up for discussion commercial morality, speculation, company promoting, and the like ; "decline in church attendance," facts and causes and suggested remedies ; "the housing of the poor, casual labour, and settlements," "sexual problems of prevention and rescue," "aggressive infidelity," "Church unity," and the relation of the "Mother Church and the Church in the Colonies." This is hardly the programme of men who "proceed on the assumption that we all believe and that we are all Christians." It is the programme of a militant Christianity, and fully reflects the mind of the Church to-day—a mind which seeks to rescue the perishing, to care for the dying, and to snatch in pity from sin and the grave ; a mind which sees clearly the great troubles of the times, and endeavours to meet them and overcome in the spirit of Him who gave the commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." I doubt not "Oxoniensis" understands the troubles and perplexities of the age ; but as regards the attitude of the Church towards them—the attitude of "learned divines and devout laymen"—he is lamentably ignorant, in that he has taken no trouble or pains to ascertain the true state of the case. Had he done so, he would have realised that in all the centuries of Christian history, with the exception of the Apostolic age, no parallel can be found to the earnestness of "learned divines and devout laymen" for the well-being of their fellow-men, both in this life and in the life to come. Thus far I venture to oppose "Oxoniensis," not for the mere sake of opposition, but because I think that he began upon an entirely false assumption. When he proceeds to explain the reasons by which men are driven from belief I find

myself drifting into a more friendly attitude. His condemnation of the popular acceptance of heaven and hell I fully share, but I think that a closer knowledge of Milton and John Bunyan would, perhaps, have explained the origin of popular acceptance. That carries me back to my statement that we are suffering still from a recrudescence of seventeenth-century theology. In my position as parish priest of St. Lawrence Jewry I have to meet daily the spiritual difficulties of men. I mean the difficulties of belief which men experience under modern conditions. It is my invariable experience that those difficulties of faith and practice arise from the hampering limitations imposed upon us by the Puritan period. I am frequently asked, and the question is always put in the light of a poser, "But what do you say to the Thirty-nine Articles?" And my invariable answer to that is, "The Thirty-nine Articles are equally binding upon laity and clergy. What do you think of the Thirty-nine Articles?" The reply most frequently given is, "I have never read them." This, I am afraid, is the almost universal answer, yet the Articles are popularly supposed to govern religious thought in the Church. It would be more correct to say that they stifle it and make religious thought impossible. The mistake lies in perpetuating that which was intended to meet the difficulties of a peculiar time and equally peculiar and singular conditions. Thus religion is often made to appear ridiculous because it is presented in a light which does not appeal to the intelligence and mental attitude of the times. We are living in the twentieth and not in the seventeenth century. We have to deal with the difficulties of to-day and not with those of the past. How can these difficulties be met and overcome? The great hope lies in the unification of ideas. For that we must have a pivot or starting-point.

Given the starting-point, men may come together. But how can that be attained? I certainly believe it to be attainable, and I maintain that Christianity provides for us the starting-point in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Nay, let us drop the word doctrine, which often creates unnecessary suspicion, and say boldly the Incarnation of Jesus Christ—the Immanuel, God with us. It is at once a response to the aspiration of the human heart to be in touch with a higher power. It meets the cry of the hopeless and broken-hearted, and gives new hope and new life. It is not more Christianity we want, but more Christ-likeness, the power of the living Christ among us, breathing the Divine into our human lives. The Incarnation is our great hope, and it should be the great theme of teachers and preachers. The ideals of the Incarnation should be the unfailing ideals of the Church, and those ideals are, as “Oxoniensis” says, given in the Sermon on the Mount and illustrated by Christ’s life, and I may add that they are ably summed up by St. James in the words, “True religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” If men can be made to grasp the great central facts of the Incarnation of Jesus as God’s message to mankind, religion will soon become what it ought to be, a living force, leading men to God.

J. STEPHEN BARRASS.

St. Lawrence Jewry, next Guildhall, E.C.

The question is one of faith, not of practice; and I could not help feeling as I read his letter that “Oxoniensis” does not sufficiently distinguish between the two. Surely some of his “axioms of the world’s creed” partake too much of the latter and not enough of the former? Is



it fair, for example, to speak of the ideal of fashionable impurity or of that of sowing one's wild oats? These are not the ideals striven after by anybody, even in society; rather they represent the practice of some of its less scrupulous members. The question, then, is not, What do we practise? but, What do we believe? not, Do we lead Christian lives? but, Are our ideals in conformity with those of Jesus? The antithesis of ideals as stated by "Oxonienensis" is very striking, but do not, it seems to me, do justice to the world's creed, which is, at least, respectable. Let me venture to revise it :—

THE IDEALS OF THE SERMON ON  
THE MOUNT.

The ideal of unworldliness.

The ideal of forgiveness, of "turning the other cheek."

The ideal of poverty.

The ideal of self-sacrifice.

THE IDEALS OF THE WORLD.

The ideal of worldly success.

The ideal of not letting others get the better of us, of "not taking it lying down."

The ideal of wealth, or, at least, of prosperity, of comfort, of more or less luxury.

The ideal of happiness.

The ideals of the worldly person are, I believe, fairly stated. They do not represent the shortcomings of erring man, but the goal after which he consciously and strenuously strives. They are the ideals not of the worst sort, but of the average self-respecting, church-going "Christian" member of society. Can they truly be called Christian in any sense? Your correspondent, "Wheat and Tares," makes the astounding statement that the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount are for us to love, but not for us to follow in detail. I have not seen this publicly stated before. I admire his candour. But, after all, is not this admission made in private by many men and women every day? People who go to church have said to me, when asked why they made so little effort to live their lives in conformity

with the precepts of Jesus, that if men followed His teaching literally the world could not go on. Perhaps it could not. It certainly could not continue to go on as it does. But would that be altogether to be regretted? Think of it: Everybody loving his neighbour, preferring his interest to his own; indifferent to food, to dress, to property; caring neither for pleasure, for wealth, for position; contemptuous of worldly success; caring only for those noble spiritual ideals which Jesus taught; pleased to be among the despised of the world, because Jesus has said that such were blessed. Would not the attainment of such a state be worth enthusiasm, if one could only believe in its possibility? Say, ye people bored with existence, would not life be then worth living? But faith is needed; faith, not in any theological dogma, but in the ideals of Jesus, in their desirability, in their possibility. Faith, the lack of which causes one to say that they were not meant for us to follow in detail. It may be said with truth that Christianity has never been given a trial. Almost from the first it became perverted, dominated by decadent Greek mysticism, and the precepts of the Master replaced by the metaphysical subtleties of theological dogma. Faith, which is synonymous with enthusiasm, which was to have been the motive force of Christians, became replaced by faith in propositions difficult of comprehension, a correct belief in which was held necessary to salvation. That is not the sort of faith which moves mountains. Faith in dogma totters. I doubt whether its disappearance will make so much difference to morals as some think. With the deeper thoughtfulness which is required to expel it will come a deeper sense of responsibility. Already, while faith fades, morals and manners are mending. More than ever before the world needs an answer to the "riddle of the Universe." We know not wherefore it

exists, nor why we are here. Consequently we know not what to be striving after. We follow pleasure awhile ; it bores us. We struggle for worldly success, and that bores us too—if we attain to it. The question for those whose time is not all taken up with earning food and shelter, is, What shall they do ? The old answers to the riddle fail us. Science has none to propose. Is the end the perfection of species, through the gradual development of body and mind ? No, for the world will grow cold, and life must cease. Materialism, then, has no answer, and since answer there must be—it cannot all be blind chance—in the spiritual world must lie the solution. The material world offers no answer to the problem of existence.

Essex.

ENQUIRER.

People are asking themselves the question, "Do we believe ?" with about the same degree of languid interest which they evince upon the subject as to whether there are canals on Mars, or whether there is really any prophylactic virtue in the newly-invented antistreptococcic serum. But if they were seriously to consider what the question really means they must inevitably come to the conclusion that it is the most important and momentous question which could be asked in this world. Of course, if they are amongst those few who have forced themselves to believe that there is no God and no evil spirit, no Heaven and no Hell, and that when they die they die the death of a dog, and, to quote the prophet Ezekiel, are buried with the burial of an ass—to these it is naturally a matter of supreme indifference whether any part of the Bible is true or whether it is not. But to those vast multitudes of the human race who believe, with the certainty of absolute conviction, that there is a hereafter, and that their fate in that hereafter will be dependent upon their life in this

brief probationary stage of their existence, then the question whether they do or do not believe in the Word of God must be a matter of the most vital and stirring moment. But I would venture to ask these latter, if they discard the Holy Bible and disbelieve in the sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin, what certainty can they have as to their future fate? When they are on the borderland of the spirit-world, and life is ebbing away, how can they make the plunge without apprehension and harassing doubt? How different their final minutes on this mortal scene to those of the believer, who is as certain as it is possible to be certain of anything that each one of those cruel lashes which his Saviour bore was the vicarious punishment for his misdeeds; that by those stripes he himself has been healed; and that a loving welcome in the realms of bliss is awaiting him. But from the time of Jehoiachim, who cut the sacred roll with a knife and cast it into the fire, until the present day, when so many are imitating the Hebrew king's example, the sacred book will remain to the end of time the solace, the guiding light, and the well-loved and trusted pilot to eternity of those who are heirs of salvation.

Hampshire.

A BANKER.

It is a great pity "Oxoniensis" did not define in what sense he uses the word "Christian." The want of this nullifies, to my mind, almost all the charges he has to make. Is it possible that he is using the term in only an ecclesiastical or ritualistic sense? We know that there are those who teach that if a person has only been duly baptized he has been, *ipso facto*, made a Christian. But I and millions like me look upon all such teaching as altogether false and mischievous, and decline to allow a doctrine of baptismal regeneration to eclipse the clear



word of the Lord, "You must be born again." When "Oxoniensis" points to the sensualist and asks, "Where is his Christianity?" we can only echo his query with this addition, "Whoever credited that man with being a Christian?" Take the list of ideals which he rightly enumerates as the gist of the Sermon on the Mount. I cannot think of a single regenerated man or woman who would not bow before them all and acknowledge from the heart their claim. But what is the use this writer makes of the high standard he has properly lifted? To condemn Christians who fall short? No! but to condemn the world—the world which does not so much as know or take notice of this standard! Here is a confusion of ideas; the standard held up is a Christian standard, but they are worldlings who are condemned for not striving after it, yet are condemned in such a way as to leave the impression that they are Christians who have proved so woefully defective. Though, alas! there are weak and tempted Christians enough to be found to give cause for many a sad stricture, yet they still measure their conduct not by the world's ideals, but by Christ's, and where they have fallen short in their best moments they deplore it; they do not seek to shelter their defection behind the world's ideals. It is one thing to fall short of an ideal, it is another to wilfully abjure it. And so it is with Christians (real) and their Master. In many ways we all come short, and lessons of humility deepen upon us the more we strive after the Perfect, but who shall judge these failures? There is but One who can do it—He who knows the heart; who can tell not only what has been achieved, but also what has been resisted; who alone knows the secret trials, temptations, and hindrances of each one's lot, and the character of the upward struggles he has been making against them. No other can. How easily we may fall into a snare



when we assume this high prerogative of the Judge of all, "Oxoniensis" is himself an example. "Think," he says, "of a millionaire calling himself a Christian in the face of the text, 'How hardly shall they that have riches (or trust in riches) enter into the kingdom of God.'" Now here is confusion of ideas again—the man who has riches confounded with the one who trusts in them. The two are not on the same standing! A man may have riches and yet be a Christian, for neither riches in themselves nor poverty in itself can qualify or disqualify for the kingdom of God. The test here, as in everything else, must be—has the man been faithful or unfaithful to his opportunities? But when "Oxoniensis" comes to put his gloss on the Lord's meaning by making His words read, "How hardly shall they that trust in riches enter into the kingdom of God," then, I submit, he begs the whole question, for there is only one kind of Christian, rich or poor—the one who trusts for salvation not to this or to that, but only to Jesus Christ. And into a similar snare "Oxoniensis" falls in his very next words. "Think," he says, "of the politician calling himself a Christian in view of the texts, 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon,' and 'Ye shall not do evil that good may come.'" Is this right? Is it fair? Is it charitable? Is it not very cheap? In order to become a politician must a man try to serve both God and mammon? Or must he do evil that good may come? There are politicians I know from whom I differ on many matters with a difference as wide as the poles, yet I know them to be upright, honest men, seeking to be as true and faithful to their light as I claim to be to mine. The whole article of "Oxoniensis," then, I submit, never once touches the thesis, "Do we—*i.e.*, Christians—believe?" As a statement of what the world believes or does not believe, I sadly grant it to be only too true. But if that means

anything, it means a call for greater Christian effort to evangelise the world, not, as almost every one who has contributed to this discussion seems to have assumed, an indictment of insincerity against Christians. The saddle, while warm, has been put on the wrong horse.

Camberwell, S.E.

J. REID HOWATT.

Our Lord Jesus Christ asked this question just before He suffered. To my mind the passage contains the most pathetic picture in the world's history. He is on His way to Gethsemane. He is surrounded by those who honestly love Him, and think that they could die for Him. They say, "Now we are sure that Thou knowest all things; by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God." Jesus answered them, "Do ye now believe? Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone" (St. John xvi.). And with regard to us coming after in the future ages, He says, talking of the duty of prayer, "And yet, will the Son of Man when He cometh find faith on the earth?" (St. Luke xviii. 8.) To which question He evidently expects the answer, "No." There are left thousands that believe in Him, and pray always to Him in spite of every hindrance. They say with St. Augustine, "*Ut oremus credamus, et ut ipsa non deficiat fides quâ oramus oremus. Fides fundit orationem: fusa oratio fidei impetrat firmitatem.*" There is none other name under Heaven disclosed as yet to man whereby we may not only be saved, but be comforted and sheltered under the heavy blows which are "the tribulation" in the lot of every one of us. Yes, the "tribulation" (the flail) is used upon us all. Instinctively the human heart turns to Him who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, He that was dead and is alive again, and now is alive for evermore,

holding out hands of succour to all, even the most sin-stained. Just remember what Napoleon said of Him when he felt the "tribulum" at St. Helena. He turned to Montholon with the inquiry, "Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?" It is the very question asked by our Lord in the Gospel for the eighteenth Sunday after Trinity. "What think ye of the Christ?" Like all our Lord's questions, it is eternal, and is always being answered as it is to-day in your great newspaper. Well, the question being declined by Count Montholon, Napoleon said, "Then, I will tell you. Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great Empires : but upon what did these great creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His Empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him. . . . I think I understand something of human nature ; and I tell you all these were men, and I am a man ; none else is like Him ; Jesus Christ was more than man. I have inspired multitudes with such an enthusiastic devotion that they would have died for me, but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present, with the electric influence of my looks, of my words, of my voice. When I saw men and spoke to them I lighted up the flame of self-devotion in their hearts. . . . Christ alone has succeeded in so raising the mind of man towards the unseen that it becomes insensible to the barriers of time and space."

F. M. BURTON, Vicar of South Banbury.

Oxon.

I think that "Oxoniensis" will agree that when Christ said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven," He did not mean necessarily to condemn the man rich in worldly goods, for I find that

He abode at the house of the rich Zacchæus, and knowing that this man was good to the poor to the half of his goods, the Saviour exclaims that "To-day is salvation come to this house." I also note that He had many disciples who were rich, such as Levi, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. Our Lord's mission was, as He said in reference to Zacchæus, "to seek and to save that which was lost."

F. E. R.

Is it not curious that the latest question raised in this twentieth century should have been conclusively answered in the sixteenth by Montaigne? "Did we believe in God, I say not through faith, but with a simple belief (I speak it to our confusion), did we but believe and know Him as we do another story, or as one of our companions, we should then love Him above all other things, by reason of the infinite goodness and unspeakable beauty that is and shines in Him. Had He but the same place in our affections that riches, pleasures, glory, and our friends have! The best of us doth not so much fear to wrong Him as he doth to injure his neighbour, his kinsman, or his master."

MARIE DE GOURNAY.

Adelaide Road, N.W.

What I take the letter of "Oxoniensis" to imply, and what I believe to be the whole drift of the most enlightened modern thought, is that what is needful above all things for the twentieth century is not an intellectual, but a moral revolution; that what we need is not so much another Newton as another Luther; a reformer with all Luther's intense earnestness and moral courage, but without his defects of narrowness and intolerance; one who shall rescue the well-nigh for-

gotten religion of Christ from the oblivion into which it has been suffered to fall ; who for the gloomy, revengeful despot of modern orthodoxy shall substitute the "all-enfolding, all-upholding" Father of the universe ; who for the well-bred indifference with which the average Englishman regards his religion shall substitute some of that deep-seated moral earnestness which is the sole ultimate source of the greatness of nations ; who can confront the modern cult of short-sighted materialism with the noble words of Goethe :

"Thou hast it destroyed, the beautiful world.  
 With powerful fist to ruin 'tis hurled,  
 By the blow of a demi-god shattered,  
 Mightier than the children of men.  
 Brightlier build it again.  
 Bid the new career commence with clearer sense,  
 And new songs of cheer be sung thereto."

Devon.

E. C. W. S.

I am asked, in my misery, deep and protracted, if "I believe." Yea, verily, I do believe ! No power on earth could have carried me through the storms that have beaten on my head, but "that anchor holds," and while I see suicide after suicide of strong men, I, an old woman, without a relative surviving, left to my fate by former friends of some forty years, yet have my feet on the "Rock of Ages," and feel an inward peace which nothing can destroy. I do most emphatically "believe," because I have put God to the test, and I commend with all my soul the glorious Gospel of Christ as the only panacea for restless, despairing souls. Try it, my brothers and sisters.

CREDO.

Permit me to thank the Bishop of Croydon for his sound and admirable letter. It must, I think, greatly



assist in calming the minds, if it does not altogether allay the doubts, of many honest doubters. How truly he says, "Let us remember that the profession which we make is a perfect one, that the ideal which we have to teach men to aim at is nothing short of this; and that it would be impossible for a Divine revelation to set before us a less exalted one." This aspect of the matter strikes me as unassailable. Let those of us who are searching after the "truth" in the meantime try to act out the life of the ideal so far as practicable. We can all surely do something, however small, to attain this very desirable end. I think many honest doubters cannot for a moment doubt that it is because we flinch from this practical living of "the life," or at least aim at it so feebly, that so many grow listless and are assailed by doubts which would possibly take years to allay. What we Englishmen badly want in the present day is more earnest and united action, and much less writing and "talk."

The Stock Exchange.

WM. W. DAVIS.

The Anglican preaching, as a whole, is pitiful, unconvincing, and inadequate. The Anglican clergy are practically untrained; it is essential they should preach without notes, and with elaborate and painstaking preparation. Each sermon will require twenty hours of study at least (I am not considering country churches, which are comparatively unimportant). Books are cheap; Stanley, Gore, the Cambridge Bible, &c., are accessible to all. And the parsons must read, systematically and continuously. They don't. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ*. The men will flock to thoughtful preaching. But I am demanding an entire re-weaving of the fabric of the clerical habitudes; when the clergy give a minimum of twenty hours a week to study, the churches will fill quickly

enough. Walsham How used to reiterate to the parsons, "Be interesting." I would add, "Yes, and in the best sense be well informed."

Yorks.

D. D.

Like the devils, most people believe ; but, unlike the devils, they do not tremble. Correct knowledge does not always, or generally, produce correct action, and faith and conduct are often hopelessly divorced. Who can stand on the sea-shore and witness the everlasting ebb and flow of the tides, or gaze at the firmament and take it in as far the finite mind can do the distances and movements there revealed? Who can study botany, geology, chemistry, or physiology, or witness the succession of day and night, winter and summer, seed-time and harvest, and not believe in the creating, directing, and maintaining power we call God? The reply to the question, "Do we believe?" is emphatically "Yes." But that to the question naturally arising out of it, "Do we act on our belief?" is equally emphatically "No."

Guildhall, Maidenhead.

BENJ. HOBBIS, Mayor.

The Bible claims to be written under the authorship of none other than the Holy Spirit of God, and, moreover, declares that the Divine Author is ever ready to enlighten those who come seeking for truth in dependence upon Him. It is because so many take their idea of Christianity from the religious novel or from the popular opinions of the day that they are in doubt what to believe, and the discourses from many of our pulpits—with a few bright exceptions—only land them deeper in the fog.

West Hampstead.

H. W. BEEDHAM, M.B.

"Dagonet" says : "The man who endeavours to square

the law of conduct laid down in the Sermon on the Mount with success in business will have to be a hypocrite or a bankrupt." I have known at least one to whom his office in Aldermanbury was as the holy of holies, who for forty years did business with Frenchmen, as well as his own countrymen, whom they honoured for his upright life and trust in them, which, although he did not speak of it, they knew was founded upon a higher trust. When competition grew keen he worked harder, but never took a mean advantage. His testimony at the end of a long life was that the Father who knows that we have need of all these things will keep His word, and add them to those whose faith holds firm. This man was certainly not a hypocrite, neither did he die a bankrupt.

Streatham.

M. S. T.

In dubbing ourselves believers and unbelievers I would humbly protest against setting up any standard of Christianity by the regularity of people's attendance at church or chapel. Public worship is a Christian duty without a doubt, but when we consider the amount of time now devoted to the singing of elaborate anthems, organ recitals, and other displays in our churches, there is but little time left for the sincere and silent worshipper. These displays may be attractive to the youthful and flippant, but to those who have topped the hill and "fixed their heads for home" 'tis but a poor solace, and satisfieth not the empty soul. It is this striving after effect, this silk hat and frock-coat church-going, this parade, this unreality, that jars on many thinking men advanced in years, and keeps them to a great extent from attending church more regularly, and being, to outward appearance at any rate, greater Christians. Christ's life was of all things real and sincere, and may not we of the twentieth century imitate? Many

of the clergy I know hold that these entertaining services are necessary to draw the young and flighty, but behind all lurks a terrible danger that it may also breed and foster a "seeming" religion, to the exclusion of that sincere belief in God which is to be admired above all things, and draw forth such a denunciation as the following: My House, which should be the house of prayer, ye have made a place of entertainment.

Woburn, Beds.

T. H. BOWEN.

I would refer to one branch of the community, and that no unimportant one, who do believe. There are many hundreds of our bluejackets—to whom, under God, this country must look for its first line of defence—that have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and who are living up to that belief as far as lieth in them. Sailors, perhaps above all others, come in simple faith to that loving Saviour who died for them as their substitute, for what class of men see more of the wonderful works of God than those who "go down to the sea in ships and see His wonders in the deep"? When I see the wonderful change in our men since the early forties, there is only one way to account for it, and that is by the spread of Christianity amongst them. There is hardly a ship in commission that has not a Bible-class or prayer meeting held on board. Think, as well, of the missions round our coasts for the merchant sailors, and the good work that has followed.

London.

REAR-ADMIRAL.

I heartily endorse the principle that all true religion is within, and I am thankful to say I have known its power for over fifty years. Jesus Christ I have proved to be a

Rock in a weary land, a refuge in the time of storm. The Holy Spirit is our daily teacher. Our Lord said to His disciples before He suffered : "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He shall guide you into all truth, for He shall receive of mine and show it unto you." I have been pained of late in reading our local sermons. With few exceptions they do not even name the Holy Spirit or His work in convincing the sinner of sin. Yet though we are anxious to honour the Holy Spirit in His revelation of the Father and the Son, we do not ignore the use of means in seeking for the salvation of our souls. It is the duty of every one who desires to participate in the greatest of all blessings to ask and they shall receive, to diligently read and search Holy Scripture. Christ Himself enjoins this, for, said He, "They testify of Me."

M. N., A WIDOW IN HER 85TH YEAR.

As regards the existence of "a soul to be saved," which has been questioned by some, that may possibly be scientifically proved, or rather confirmed, for it must not be forgotten that now several eminent scientific authorities—amongst others, Sir William Crookes, Alfred Russel Wallace, and Sir Oliver Lodge—aver that, having carefully investigated the subject, they have proved not only the survival of personality after natural death, but that, under certain circumstances, communion with such personalities can be attained. Had any one of these authorities affirmed a discovery such as, indeed, "Crookes' tubes" or X-rays their judgment would have been accepted unquestioningly, but the interest of the Church or State has never been aroused to the importance of confirming and making public what, if true, is the most momentous scientific pronouncement of this or any other age.

St. Margaret's-on-Thames.

A BELIEVER.



Is it not possible that the undoubtedly waning faith of men is owing not so much to a failure in the faculty of believing as to a change in the "object" which is being presented for their belief? Might not the strength of "faith" be restored to the national character if the knowledge out of which it originally grew were again sought out and taught to the people. Now this source of knowledge—the Bible—is no longer taught by the teachers, read by the elders, or learned by the children, as it was in the days of faith. One hears of "Church teaching," the Prayer Book, tradition, ceremonies, confessions, masses, High Church and Low Church, Catholicity and Protestantism, but seldom of the "Word of God which is the sword of the Spirit." The Bible is becoming an unknown book. Give the Bible—not the book merely, but the teaching and knowledge contained therein—back to the people, especially the children, and you will give England back her "faith."

Canford Vicarage, Wimborne.

FENWICK FISHER.

A belief in God without a creed is no belief at all. For if God has not thought fit to deposit any special message on earth, He cannot be said to court belief; and therefore it is a matter of small importance—this question we argue with such zest. So may we not leave out of the question those people who say, "We believe in a God, but not in the Church's interpretation of Him—that is all"? Assuredly this is foolish. The question lies between a God and a creed, or a God in such an abstract sense that does not—to speak quite reverently—signify. And to Atheists—genuine ones—I would say this: Have you well considered the fact that twelve ordinary men, without any influence, headed by a leader, could by a peaceful preaching so utterly confound and alter the religions of the day

as to make it now universally acknowledged over the whole civilised world? I now pass on to the great crucial question asked in England at present, "Do we believe?" (in a creed, I take it). I answer, "Certainly we do not." Why not? Because we have in our small island well-nigh bordering on three hundred different interpretations of the message Christ bequeathed us. I state the reason boldly—Irreverence! Irreverence is the very root of unbelief. For if we have no respect for a thing, we cannot believe in it. Religion itself in the abstract is laughed and mocked at by the very men who preach Christ. They preach a contradiction in terms, and do not seem to realise it. Had the Reformation anything to do with it? Did we fling off the yoke of Rome in too much haste? Did we spit at it too much? Was the bright light of the Renaissance too dazzling for us, hiding from us the future? God grant it was not so—that we were right—and yet I tremble. It seems to me we had forgotten Christ's own words, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." It almost seems to me as if we had accused Christ of not keeping His word, as if He was not with His Church; for if He had been, would He have guided it into deliberate error? I don't say we were wrong; but might we not—ought we not—to have retained our catholicity in a greater degree? What happened when we opened our Bible and told every one to come and select his own faith from it?—why, the three hundred sects of to-day; the messengers who clamour they are the true! The natural result followed, bickering, fightings, quarrels, and now, to-day, the scene is unparalleled. How can an army conquer if not united? How can men build a house except they agree? This irreverence, this indifference to Holy Church and holy things fostered at the Reformation by the men who threw

off Rome, and encouraged and continued through all the ages up to now, is a terrible seed from which to expect a believing crop.

REGINALD BENNETT.

St. Catharine's College, Cambridge.

I am a woman who from childhood until now has had trouble and sorrow of many kinds—not only those sad crises which come into all lives, but the ever-present little and big sorrows which tend to crush one down to the ground, and from which one rarely emerges without having lost much of the elasticity of mind which helps one to face fresh troubles. Still, the one thing that has upheld me in the past, and I trust will uphold me to the end, is my firm belief in a loving Father, a personal Saviour; and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Tell me, what else in the whole world can so help one who suffers? I would not give up my belief in the love of God for all the riches in the world.

ONE WHO BELIEVES.

I was privileged in the year 1879 to found a union and society, the object being to make the Third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity better known, loved, honoured, and worshipped. Upwards of 100,000 persons have promised to pray daily for the Holy Spirit. The late Dr. Ward, of America, took up this important subject warmly, and enrolled 20,000 members. Nine million publications have been circulated with regard to the Holy Spirit,

HENRY LAW HARKNESS,

Late Rector of St. Swithin's, Worcester.

3, Langdale Road, Hove.

The first great commandment of God in the days of old

to His people was not, as it might have been, "Thou shalt believe," but "Thou shalt love." Our Lord also, to the Scribe who asked what was the first and great commandment, repeated the same words, "Thou shalt love." Whom? First God, then man. Again, to the rich young ruler who wanted eternal life, Jesus says simply, "Love, and thou shalt live." Here one would have surely thought He would have demanded "Belief." Up to seven years ago I had no knowledge of God or of Christ. I write these words chiefly to say—feeling it may perhaps help some one—that I did not "believe" until I "loved." I fell in love with Christ, and tried to live, with all my powers, the Sermon on the Mount—only to please Him who had satisfied and filled for ever in a wonderful way the longing of my heart. But "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The light of life! What is it? Only love, and God is love, and love is knowledge. Belief alone never made a man or woman Christlike, and the purpose of all belief, of all religion I take it, is to make us like Christ.

#### A CONVERTED JEWESS.

Brora, Sutherlandshire.

I am an Indian, and as such am supposed to have been born surrounded by all the mysteries of a mysterious religion. I confess, however, that I never knew what these mysteries were, nor have I ever felt their force to influence either way the destinies of my life. Whether the fact of my being born of Christian parents neutralised the effects of inherited Hindoo religious instincts on my acceptance of my parents' adopted belief is beside the question; but the fact remains that after having served the Church faithfully for the whole of my youth, I am in a position of painful doubt as to whether I would not



to-day be the better, physically and intellectually, for the direction of those youthful energies into channels of my own weak making. As one acquainted somewhat with the teachings of the chief religions of the East, I readily concede that the doctrines of the Christian Church are by far the most acceptable for their profound comprehensiveness, evidenced in their just realisation of the necessity for providing for the remotest exigencies of human existence and happiness, both spiritual and temporal, here and for the hereafter. But whereas your preaching is one and your practice another, the spiritual life and conduct with the Hindoo, Mohammedan, Buddhist, Confucian is in strict accordance with the tenets of his faith, a reality to which Christianity has no parallel to offer. The greatness of a nation depends upon the religious education of its people, and though I have already remarked that the degree and extent of Christian practice is painfully below Christian precepts, nevertheless the little but faithful practice by English men and women of some of the incomparable points of your religion has more than made up for the downright hypocrisy of the overwhelming majority, and has uplifted England high above the horizon as the home of liberty, freedom, and justice. But such a name has not been won for England as a consequence of the universal beauty of your national life. The glory of England has only been won by a handful of persons, and is maintained by a handful of persons. To say that even Englishmen are all alike would be to contend that they all have blue eyes. Whence the beauties of life claimed by you are not of universal existence, and the much-advertised fair play and justice are anything but a national characteristic. You say religion is not to be condemned for the acts of its followers. I agree ; but in order to answer the question



whether I believe, I must be convinced, because of my intellectual and spiritual inferiority, that my teachers are believers in the very lessons they would have me follow. Yet it remains undeniable that Christianity has done for the world and for mankind in general what others had only partially succeeded in doing, if at all, and has attained the best results generally. Wherefore, if for this reason alone, I am a believer in the reality of the institution and the divinity of its Founder.

Lincoln's Inn.

J. ROYEPPEN.

Vague, indefinite ideas of what the Higher Criticism and Science have proved are in the air, and people who have not the time, opportunity, equipment, or inclination to study these things for themselves are possessed with doubts and fears which enervate and weaken them in face of the temptations and trials of life. Faith must be firm and unshaken to enable us to follow after the unseen and eternal and sacrifice the seen and temporal. Let it be shaken or weakened, and every one hastens to make sure of the bird in hand and to get as many more as possible. This is so at the present time, when every one seems to believe that it is more blessed to grab than to give. The preachers are as bad as the members of their congregations, with few exceptions, and all together are like gamblers who do not mind risking a little, but have not sufficient confidence to risk their all. Yet all the promises are to those who give all and are ready to undergo any privation, to make every sacrifice. It is, therefore, only in accordance with the teaching of Christ Himself that spiritual realisation does not follow from the half-confidence we give Him. If He is indeed the Christ of God, whether Divine or not, He is worthy of full confidence. The world is sharp enough to despise a

speculative half-faith, and so gets farther and farther away from it.

FREDERICK J. CORAM.

3, The Avenue, St. George, Bristol.

I think nearly every thinking working man is attracted to Jesus of Nazareth, because He was in a parallel position to him. He suffered privations and bore them with a patience and humility that we cannot approach in the slightest, because He was God and we are only very ordinary human beings. Nevertheless we admire Him, and if sincere admiration and respect is worship, then we worship Him. I have worked for a great many employers, but I never received the least extra consideration or kindness from those who professed to be believers than I have done from those who made no assertions of religion and attended no place of worship. So I agree with those who say that as a rule men do not let their religion influence their daily life. It is an old saying, "There is no friendship in business," and if for the word "business" the word "Christianity" is substituted, it would, I think, accurately state the case.

Isle of Portland.

WORKING MAN.

May I answer the question by an illustration? I knew a woman, perhaps the most drunken and dissolute of a town of 60,000 inhabitants. Her days were spent mostly in the public-house or the lock-up, and her nights in the streets. A Christian sister, Good Samaritan-like, "went where she was," and followed her for months with the message of forgiveness and hope we call the "Gospel." One whole night she spent with her in her wretched room, trying to persuade her to receive God's invitation to return to Him in heart contrition. At last she yielded, and believed in God's Word of reconciliation

to her personally, was restored to the path of virtue, and is now seeking to reclaim her old companions in sin. This occurred seven or eight years ago—she can give you the exact day and hour when the change came like a miracle, the moment she “believed.”

Buxton.

H. FAULDER.

A statement which the late Mr. Gladstone made may be recalled. He said :—

“The longer I live, the more I feel that Christianity does not consist in any particular system of Church government, or in any credal statement, but that Christianity is Christ.”

Mayfield, Sussex.

CHARLES S. C. WATKINS.

Forty years ago, as an Eton boy, I found out what it was to trust my whole being to Christ, making myself over to Him as His personal property, and definitely accepting His leadership in all things. From that day, though deeply conscious of innumerable shortcomings, I have never doubted my pardon, my acceptance, and my hope ; and, thank God, I am able to praise Him for answered prayers in countless variety. As to unanswered prayer—personal confidence in the God we pray to will do much to simplify the difficulty. Paul prayed three times that the thorn in his flesh might be removed, but God did not remove it. Instead of doing so He said, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” The unbeliever will say that prayer was not answered ; the believer will say the exact opposite, because the latter in his prayer desires the fulfilment of God’s good pleasure only, the former desires his own wishes, and God’s will is immaterial to him.

Bucks.

ETONENSIS CREDENS.

I belong to a class that is not only supposed not to believe, but, by a large number of people, not to know anything about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I refer to the cab-drivers of London. For the information of such I would like to say there are about 3,000 men driving cabs in London at the present time who firmly believe in the Bible, and who are trusting in Jesus Christ for their salvation.

London.

SANKEY THE CABMAN.

It cannot be denied that the modern criticism has made some inroads upon popular beliefs, but here, too, questions arise. First, is it quite certain that these beliefs are any essential part of real Christianity? If a man walks in the footsteps of Christ I care not whether he believe that the whale swallowed Jonah or Jonah the whale. Second, under the action of this new criticism may we not have gained quite as much as we have lost? I believe we have gained more than we have lost. After the wave of criticism has passed over, what we do hold we hold more firmly than ever.

Wembdon Vicarage, Bridgwater.

J. M. E.

Do we, doctors, who are brought into touch with Nature's most minute workings, with suffering humanity and death, believe? I have no authority to answer, but I can assuredly say that all the medical men whom I am intimately acquainted with do believe, "at bottom." I think it is a true and deeply-seated belief; not like that of many of your correspondents, which has only come to them in time of trouble, and which reminds one of the old rhyme:—

"God and the doctor we alike adore,  
But only when in danger, not before.  
The danger past, both are alike required;  
God is forgotten and the doctor slighted."



Is it true that we cannot believe if we do not act up to our belief? Does the drunkard believe that it would be better for him to be a sober man? Yes, he does; but still he drinks. So with most men. They know the wages of sin, but still they sin; but most of us hope to be forgiven.

London.

A MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

It only requires a casual glance into the biography of the late Sir James Paget to convince the reader that this talented man believed implicitly in the Christian faith, with its doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement, and also that this belief was a living reality to him. I would also point out the Christian life of the late Sir Andrew Clark, author of "The Physician's Testimony for Christ." It has often been argued against Christianity that the lives of professing Christians are so at variance with what they profess. May I point out that it is not the fault of the original if the photograph does not do it justice. Christianity has been the prop of lives innumerable; this faith has made England what it is. John Richard Green, writing in his "Short History of the English People," says, "Civilisation, art, letters, which had fled before the sword of the English conquest, returned with the Christian faith. Slavery was gradually disappearing before the efforts of the Church, the murder of a slave by lord or mistress, though no crime in the eye of the State, became a sin for which penance was due to the Church." When we hear such arguments let us remember the above; let us remember our hospitals began with such institutions as St. Bartholomew's, in London, founded by Rahere, under the bishop; that our asylums for the reception of the insane derived their name "Bedlam" from Bethlehem, a house of charity in London. Finally, the very definition of the word "faith" tells us that the believer has no easy



task; and, indeed, what kind of belief would it be if it was the evidence of visible things?

London.

G. BRIDGE.

The great problem which underlies the discussion is not really do we believe, but what do we believe? When people assert their belief in the primal essential of a creed, viz., in God, hardly two agree in what that concept involves. Creeds began in asserting the revengeful savagery of a Supreme Being demanding holocausts of innocent victims, and thence onwards through the idea of an outraged Father, unappeased without blood, towards the gentler teaching of the infinite compassion of a Mother-Father God. Those who profess to believe in the existence of ministering angels round the throne often speak as if they thought that God interposed directly Himself in all the tiny details of a microcosmic life. Those who believe that God is a spirit, and that worship in the spirit is the only worship that can reach Him, teach as if "going to church" was an integral part of Christian duty. The spiritual worship of the Quietists in the inner temple of the self, and the silent communing of the assembled Friends at their Sabbath meetings, are both going out of fashion in an age which demands sensationalism and materialism in its attempt to fill churches at any price, owing to its belief that "going to church" is an essential of Divine worship. As a medical man, seeing much of pain and suffering and dying, my experience does not lead me to think that it is the profession of the Christian creed which is by any means the sole method of securing happiness of soul in this world, or which removes the fear of passing on to the next. Cruelty seems to breed pain and fear, and so long, for example, as we celebrate the advent of the gentle Christ in Jesus by inflicting untold

suffering upon thousands and thousands of sentient animals and call it "keeping Christmas," so long must material sense worship shut us off from that higher spirit worship which destroys fear and removes the dread of death. We all believe something, but we all need a wider conception of God as the basis of our creed—a belief in a God who loves and saves Hindoos and Buddhists and Mohammedans, as well as Christians of a hundred sects, and prepares each, by the experience of one or more earth lives, for the next school of training in the great evolutionary march of embryonic souls from chaos towards that perfected state which can gaze upon the face of God Himself.

Harley Street, W.

JOSIAH OLDFIELD.

The following is a copy of letter received by me from his Grace the Right Hon. and Most Rev. Frederick Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, in May, 1902.

Strood.

G. BOORMAN.

"LAMBETH PALACE, S.E., *May 27, 1902.*

"MY DEAR SIR—I do not see that recent discoveries in science or literature make the doctrine of our Lord's Incarnation either obscure or doubtful. Our Lord's Incarnation was both a miracle and a mystery. It has always been so. It remains so. It will always remain so. But certainly it cannot be affected in either of these respects by any discovery whatever. Miracles are now rare, and perhaps never occur at all. But that does not prove, and never could prove, that miracles never did occur in past times. We are in God's hands, and if He chooses at certain times in history to allow miracles to be worked, that is not inconsistent with His choosing at other times not to allow miracles to be worked. Of

course, if we do not believe that there is a God, or that, if there is, He can work miracles, the case is altered. But if we believe in God's existence and in His almighty power the difficulty vanishes.

"Yours faithfully,

"George Boorman, Esq."

"F. CANTUAR.

We do believe, and our belief is that "God is Love," that God manifested His love towards us by sending His Son into the world to unite man to Himself, thus bringing into man eternal life, and that this Son of God and Son of Man is a living Christ, who lives in the hearts of those who yearn for His presence, enlightening their consciences, quickening that Divine seed of life which is in every man, and giving His abiding presence to those who keep His word. To think of God in any other aspect than in that of Love drives man to the terrible conclusion which "A.B." has expressed in your issue of October 17th, as One to whom to pray is impertinent. There is so much apparently to shake our faith in God's love that man longs for the evidence of it, and that alone is brought home to us when we realise that God was in Christ, "reconciling the world unto Himself, and not reckoning unto them their trespasses," when Jesus Christ walked this earth, sharing with man in his joys, sorrows, and doubts, and teaching us to pray to His Father as to our Father. And this Christ is no dead Christ, who came as a great Teacher or Master, and has left us alone with His teaching, but is a still living Christ, whose real presence may be found in our own hearts, who is alive to all our manifold temptations, helping us to resist them, and to live more Christlike lives, according to our faith in Him.

London.

A QUAKER.

As one of the "we," do I "believe"? Yes; I do believe in what are called the articles of the Christian faith. And what effect has this belief had upon my life? First, it has made me a Ritualist; because I believe in and love my God and my Saviour Jesus Christ, I find my greatest happiness in our beautiful Eucharistic services; I feel that there I am brought into the very presence of Him whom my soul loves, because I believe. Our stately processions, our beautiful music, are to me channels through which I can in a human way express a little of the enthusiasm I feel. It is in these services that the reality of my religion is brought home to me. But is this all? Has my belief no effect on my actions, on my mode of life? I have tried to think the matter out carefully, and I am surprised to find how it does enter into my life. I am one of the middle class, educated but poor, and obliged to earn my living. My belief makes me on the first of each month put aside half of my earnings. A certain amount of this goes to uphold the services I love, but by far the larger amount finds its way directly or indirectly into the pockets of the suffering poor; in order to do this, I must dress myself as economically as is consistent with my station. My belief makes me give up most of my spare time to working for God in His Church; it makes me on Sunday give up my afternoon rest; it makes me get up an hour earlier in the morning that I may worship God in His holy temple and dedicate myself and the day to Him. It makes me on Friday use abstinence in my food, that I may in this way remind myself how on Friday our dear Lord suffered because of my sins. It makes me examine myself, to find out how I am neglecting to live up to the Christian standard. And is the hope of a reward the motive of my life? I answer, I hardly know; but I confess that at times the thought that I may some day see the "King in



His beauty," and even hear from His gracious lips the "Well done," is to me inexpressibly sweet.

London.

A RITUALIST.

As a soldier who has seen active service, and death in various forms, both sudden and, as I may call it, prepared, as by previous illness, I am convinced that my comrades, as a mass, do believe. They do not talk about it, and it is hard to find any proof of it, but they do believe. But, barring exceptional cases, they believe in no "sealed pattern" creed. The average soldier believes in a Supreme Being because he cannot help it, and he stops there. I think he feels that this Being is well-disposed to him, because, although he also believes in a future state—of this I am sure—I have yet to see a man frightened or worried at the approach of death. And this belief makes him try to do what he feels is right and avoid wrong. A soldier's idea of right and wrong is very much changed by his environment, however, and he does feel himself to be in fault for that. And a soldier is a working man, with the corners rubbed off by friction.

Malta.

SOLDIER.

The question raised in your columns, "Does the average Christian believe in the creed he professes?" is a serious one. The test proposed is a moral one. The Sermon on the Mount is given for the standard of the Christian, and the debased worldly opposite of its precepts for the life which is being led by the un-Christian world around us. The question is, Which of these two is the practical faith of the average Christian? The very proposal of such a question would almost seem an insult. But we must remember the Christian creed is very much more than the Sermon on the Mount. It is a revelation of things



supernatural, of a future state and the immortality of the soul, of the redemption, regeneration, salvation of the world in Jesus Christ. It concerns all that Jesus Christ was, as well as all that He did, including His cross, His resurrection, ascension, and events of the Day of Pentecost. An experience of more than fifty years in town congregations leaves me convinced that a large average of those congregations sincerely believe this Christian creed and more or less faithfully and successfully live it. In the nature of the case none of us attain to the perfect ideals of Jesus Christ and His Sermon on the Mount, and to insist on the literal application of its figurative precepts is a foolish and irrational thing, which would reduce to absurdity most of our figurative proverbial maxims. But the insinuation that the average Christian of our congregations, whilst professing the Christian creed, practically lives in the debased worldly creed, is false and calumnious. And the proof of this is in their general endeavour to lead something like a consistent Christian life, in their reverent observance of religious duties and their works of Christian charity, and in the testimony of a multitude of departing Christian souls of a victory over death and an eternal hope beyond the grave, or, at least, of a quiet, humble trust in their Christian creed.

#### THE VICAR OF MIDDLESBROUGH.

The time has come when "we dare look things in the face and eschew all mealy-mouthed falsehoods." It is asked then, "Have we a revelation from God?" Undoubtedly we have. Do these Scriptures predicate the Deity, Divinity, and Humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ? Without question they do. Did Christ in every way uphold the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures?

Most certainly He did. Is the so-called higher criticism worthy of the name? No; its folly is becoming apparent to all those who are in a position to examine its arguments, and this folly will soon be manifest to all. Let me give but one or two illustrations. It is asserted by these critics that the Book of Daniel was not written for more than two hundred years after the prophecies of Ezekiel. But Ezekiel mentions Daniel three times, and that in a very marked manner. Ask a higher critic to tell you who this renowned Daniel—the younger contemporary of Ezekiel—was, and the foolishness of his reply will cure you of any leaning to this form of unbelief. Or again. These critics assert that the Pentateuch is of postexilic date. Ask them from what source the very ancient Samaritan copy of these Five Books was obtained, and to your astonishment you will find that they have not given, and cannot give, any answer to so reasonable a question. Is it likely that, in view of the bitter feud between the Samaritans and the Jews, the former would have accepted writings compiled by those who had been so hostile to them? The so-called higher criticism cannot stand the test of true scholarship, and, what is of even wider importance, it cannot face the plain arguments of ordinary common sense.

J. J. B. COLES.

16, Victoria Mansions, West Kensington, W.

There is a trying time coming for the unbeliever, however high his ethical code may be. I refer to Hebrews ix. 27: "It is appointed unto men once to die." This once is sufficient. There is only one thing that can take away really the sting of death, and that is believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. I have been present at many death-beds in my sick-visiting during the last quarter of a century. It is

marvellous how God's children (believers in the Lord Jesus) can smile in the presence of this grim monster. I was present at the death-bed of Dr. Keith, the Scotch divine, whose name will be familiar to many, and who wrote a book on prophecy (considered an able work). This man, when in the very throes of death, said to me, "Be seated ; all things are ours, Christ is ours," and with a smiling face sought to comfort me in my distress. I could mention barristers, lawyers, poor people, and rich people, both young and old, who have died in this simple faith, all overcoming, because of the help promised in Philippians iv. 19 (which promise never fails), "My God shall supply all your need," and my testimony is the same in every case. I have never seen it fail once. I have also seen the sceptic quit his unbelief before this great enemy death, and find help in the Saviour after all. Does not the Lord Jesus say, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37)? We read Bishop Butler died resting in this promise, and an innumerable number of others. Why need there be unbelievers with a promise like this?

Robertson Road, Buxton.

A. SCHOFIELD.

To say that the ultimate reality is unthinkable is only another way of saying that we are finite beings, and that, therefore, all our trains of reasoning must, as Bacon puts it, "end abruptly," compelling us in the last resort to take refuge in faith. Or, to put the same thing in another form, if we could completely think or understand the being of God He would not be God, because we dominate that which we completely understand. The final unthinkable-ness of God is, therefore, a necessary part of the Christian doctrine of God. Keeping this in mind, nothing is more amusing to those who understand the true force and mean-

ing of that starting-point of modern philosophy, the relativity of knowledge, than the assumption of your secularist correspondents that the Christian doctrine of God is to be rejected because God is finally "unthinkable." These gentlemen ignore the fact that the ultimate ideas of Science are also unthinkable, an unthinkableness, however, that in no way prejudices Science. Absolute truth is for ever beyond our reach, for the simple reason that we are finite beings. We believe, indeed, that the two fragments of truth—Science and Religion—are reconciled in God, but the understanding of their reconciliation is beyond us. As for physical science disproving the existence of God—that is pure and simple nonsense. The existence of God is a question that in no way concerns that form of science. Neither Science nor Religion can verify themselves ultimately on theoretical or speculative grounds. Their verification is in the last resort practical. We believe that which in some way or other helps us in our practical life; Science because it enables us to control nature; Religion because it enables us to rise in spirit above nature by faith in God. It does not do to deny the absolute character of knowledge and to glorify knowledge as before. For if knowledge is not absolute it is relative, and the relativity of knowledge can only mean that we regard this or that theory as true because it serves some useful human end. It is "practically" true. This being the case, we can well believe the practical truth both of Science and Religion, for both serve useful ends, the former enabling us to dominate nature, the latter to make the best of our human nature by living the highest life. By religion I mean Christianity in its pure moral and spiritual form—faith in the God of Love or Father revealed by Jesus Christ.

FRANCIS A. N. PARKER.

Waddington Vicarage, Clitheroe.



"Atheist" says he has "read deeply and travelled far," but surely he has done so with "ear that heard not, eyes that saw not, and a heart that did not understand." Can he read such a description of a single blade of our common meadow grass as that given us by Ruskin and still deny the work of Him of whom it is written, "In wisdom hath He made them all"? Can he have looked on even the commonest object in nature and yet deny the "Being that is in the clouds and air"? Certainly an Atheist can be a "loyal subject and a moral man," but he cannot be what is far more important, and contains the other two—a happy man—at least not in the widest, deepest, truest sense—and surely something more is expected of us than loyalty and morality. Are we no higher than the intelligent animals? for certainly they share these two virtues with us. Does not "Atheist" recognise our three-sided nature—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—and the great fundamental reason and object of our life here, growth? As Browning says, "What came we here on earth for but to grow?" The universal law of all creation is development. With regard to the question with which the writer concludes his letter, surely it is perfectly clear to all who really think about the subject that God is not the originator of war, poverty, crime, &c., but man. God manifests Himself by law, and it is man's disregard of law which is the starting-point of all the evils of our life.

Upper Tooting, S.W.

G. HOLMAN.

Your readers would like to know what were the convictions of Lord Beaconsfield on the subject of this correspondence. Speaking before a diocesan conference at Oxford in 1864, with Bishop Samuel Wilberforce in the chair, he said: "Instead of believing that the age of faith



has passed, when I observe what is passing around us, what is taking place in this country, and not only in this country but in other countries and in another hemisphere, instead of believing that the age of faith has passed, I hold that the distinguishing characteristic of the present age is a craving for faith. My lord, man is born to believe, and if no Church comes forward with its title-deeds of truth, sustained by the traditions of sacred ages, and by the unshaken convictions of countless generations to guide him, then he will undoubtedly soon find altars and idols in his own heart and in his own imagination. And what must be the relations of a powerful Church without any distinctive creeds of its own with a being of such a nature? Why, before long we should be living in a flitting scene of spiritual phantasmagoria. There are no tenets, however extravagant, and no practices, however objectionable, which would not speedily develop under such a state of affairs, opinions the most absurd, and ceremonies the most revolting."

Gatehouse, Scotland.

CREDENTI NIHIL DIFFICILE.

Christian faith rests upon a complex basis of reason, emotion, will, testimony, and experience. Our reason is at all times subject to a certain bias, inherited or acquired, which has its effect in adding to, or subtracting from, the due weight of human testimony. But in spite of this fact, love and hope are essential elements of a healthy nature, and I hold, with Mansel and Mozley, that it is morally incumbent upon a man that he should wish Christianity to be true. If he steadily continue so to wish, he is likely to end, sooner or later, in believing that it is true. The power so to wish depends largely on his use of the opportunities afforded him for acquiring fresh knowledge, and for testing his religion in a practical way. It is a pheno-

menon of universal occurrence that the more earnestly we try to follow the voice of conscience the less difficult it becomes to believe in Christ as the God-Man. Perhaps for the complete testing of the Christian scheme some intermittent acquaintance with doubt (I will not say with unbelief) is necessary, or in many cases desirable. If the above statement be accepted as correct, I am convinced that there are many thousands of men, women, and even children who deserve to be called Christian believers in the higher sense. But, let us remember, Christ Himself is the foundation of the doctrinal edifice, just as He is of the edifice of souls; and whatever a man builds on this foundation "the fire shall try it, of what sort it be." The fire is trying it already; and if the Christian believer should mistake an insecure superstructure for a necessary portion of the building, he lays up for himself disappointment (and, perhaps, worse) in the future. Bishop Butler reminded us nearly 170 years ago that "neither . . . various readings nor early disputes about the authors of particular parts, nor any other things of the like kind, . . . could overthrow the authority of the Scriptures, unless the prophets, apostles, or our Lord had promised that the Book containing the Divine revelation should be secure from these things." A clergyman of the Church of England but lately took strong objection to some recent utterances of the Dean of Westminster on the subject of the Bible. Many of us feel that we owe to Dr. Armitage Robinson and to Canon Sanday and the Bishop of Worcester an intellectual and spiritual debt which we can never hope to repay. Each of these three writers lays it down as an axiom that the Bible ought to be examined as impartially as any other book. The arguments of such men are extremely valuable; the fact that they are Christian believers is, if anything, more

valuable still. There may be those who feel themselves qualified to criticise the statements made by such authorities. For myself, I can only offer to each of my above-mentioned teachers the expression of my humble and sincere gratitude.

31, Mornington Crescent, N.W.

O. A. ARCHER.

As a matter of fact, the latest and best science only confirms the accuracy of the Word of God, showing it to be indeed "the impregnable rock." When the modern pulpit leaves destructive criticism and again teaches the grand old truths of the inspired Book men will believe ; they cannot believe in abstractions or rest on doubts. I submit, therefore, that the cause of much of the present unbelief is : (1) The weakening of their doctrinal position by the Churches themselves, and (2) the lack of simplicity in Christian worship. If, instead of gathering together to be delighted with beautiful music and ritual, men would come to thank God for His blessings, to supplicate His help, and diligently to study His Word for practical direction for daily life, there would be less reason to inquire "Do we believe?" or to complain that the Christian faith does not display itself in those works without which faith is dead.

New Wandsworth.

ROBT. MCALISTAR.

The valuable correspondence on "Do we believe?" has been read by many in this distant city with deep interest. May I be allowed to contribute an extract which appears to me to go to the root of the matter? "Without an inward disclosure to the heart there is no religion (belief), and if this disclosure is given no argument can ever shake its certainty."

"Whoso has felt the spirit of the Highest  
 Cannot confound, nor doubt Him, nor deny ;  
 Yea, with one voice, oh ! world, though thou deniest,  
 Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

Faith is the gift of God, but if people wilfully and persistently turn their backs upon Him they cannot expect Him to bestow it upon them. Hence the unbelief of the present day.

Hamburg.

N. C. USHER.

Let us all believe in one thing, and that is, that it is our duty to bring happiness where we can. Let us swallow our doubts of the doctor, and recommend him to our friends. Faith cures all things ; why suggest, then, that any one should disbelieve ? Above all things, let the doctors hide their doubts. No successful medical man will wear a grievous countenance, and no clergyman should ever speak a word of doubt.

THE AUTHOR OF "THE MODERN CHRISTIAN."

6, West Harding Street.

I would suggest to those persons who are uneasy in their minds concerning the inspiration of the Bible that they should read attentively the following lines written on the subject by Sir Walter Scott, which Lord Byron transcribed into his own Bible :—

"Within this awful Volume lies  
 The mystery of mysteries.  
 Happiest he of human race  
 To whom his God has given grace  
 To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,  
 To lift the latch, and force the way ;  
 And better had he ne'er been born  
 Who reads to doubt, or reads to scorn."

When I call to mind that the Bible, as it stands, was accepted by the late Dean Farrar and the late Mr.

Gladstone, men of stupendous intellect and profound learning, I cannot believe otherwise than that it is the Word "which was, and is, and is to come."

Ealing.

FREDERICK BAKER.

I once saw a leper in a location in Africa receiving the holy sacrament of confirmation, and in the joy and hope which was written large all over his disfigured face I read the answer to the question of the hour, "Do we believe?" And this man, a victim for years, had neither hands nor feet, and was an outcast of the people, spending the rest of his days in the most hideous environment one can conceive.

Buxton.

SPES.

Are these discarders of dogma and creeds right? Can they really discard them? May it not be that many discard them because their faith is not really sound, and they do not want to, or cannot be definite; and others because they do not believe at all? Surely, if we believe in the Christian faith we should be able to define our faith. Can it be that that faith is something vague and interpretable according to the vagaries of the individual professing Christian? A correspondent says truly, "We are the heirs of ages." Heirs of what? The Christian faith he would answer. Then, I ask, what is it? And it is only by dogma and creed that it can be described and explained. It was by such means that that grand inheritance was handed down through the ages up to the time of the Reformation; since which time protest against dogma and creed has been the rule in this land; and with what result? It is a question seriously and thoughtfully debated, "Do we believe?" As an old-fashioned Christian, a Roman Catholic, I look on and wonder, and say to



myself, drop the title-deeds—dogmas and creeds—and I may lose the identity of the property. The Christian faith is founded upon more than vague instinct and emotion ; it is founded on historical fact.

ARTHUR C. MORGAN.

Osnaburgh House, Regent's Park, N.W.

It is a pity that men who are specialists in one or two particular directions should set to work to instruct others in a direction where they are not specialists. What would Sir Hiram S. Maxim think of me, for example, if I, a student of theology, were to attempt to instruct him in such special subjects as mathematics or engineering ? In his letter to you we actually find him saying : "All scientific truths are exact truths, everywhere and at all times, but the same is not true by any means in regard to religious truths." I should like to say respecting the above statement, "no greater nonsense could have been penned." Of course, I do not for one moment expect to alter Sir Hiram Maxim's opinions, but I should like to be allowed to say a few words to set forth the position of a student of theology. True theology (by which I mean not ecclesiastical, but Biblical theology) is every whit as exact a science as any of the so-called "sciences" ; absolute truth as certainly exists in theology as in geology, astronomy, &c. The religion of Jesus Christ, as set forth in the New Testament, is not only founded upon facts as surely as is any other "science," but is founded upon facts the knowledge of which is not the result of mere induction or of guess-work, but of direct revelation from God to man. The fundamental truth of Biblical theology is this : That the man once known as Jesus was the Son of God incarnate. Once grasp this fact, and every other theological truth gradually becomes clear and intelligible ; but if a man fail

to grasp this fact, or refuse to accept it, theology will for him ever be a chaos. Still, the fact of the Deity, of the man Christ Jesus, will ever remain a fact—an absolute, exact, and eternal fact, whether men accept it or not.

WERNER H. K. SOAMES.

St. George's, Greenwich.

For years the tendency has been marked to separate Christianity from Christ—in other words, to make it Arian. But Arianism has no logical standpoint, and the attempt will as certainly fail as it did in the sixth century, when nearly all Europe was Arian. For if Christ be not the Son of God, as He said He was, then He was either a madman or an impostor, and died for a delusion or a lie. Such a man can obtain no lasting credence, and His ethical system stands condemned by its own author. But if He be the Son of God, then the new life of the Eternal Kingdom, pardon, righteousness, and the hope of His re-appearing are to be found by faith in Him. Then the holiness of the saints in past ages is explained, as it can be explained in no way else. Then by partaking of His spirit and His life, His ethical system can be obeyed as no one could hope to obey it otherwise. The fact is that the knowledge of the mind is slow in following the faith of the heart. Hence men are better believers than they think they are.

“Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell;  
That heart and mind, according well,  
May make one music as before,  
But vaster—”

And this harmony will only be complete when we know everything. Even in my time Science has borne most marvellous testimony to spiritual truth. It has utterly

swept away the materialistic philosophy of Comte and Mill. It has recanted the errors of its first crude ideas of evolution, its supposition of the physical basis to mind, and its theory of the molecule. Now it stands aghast before the open door that shows the spiritualisation of the atom and the universe! I am thankful to live to witness this grand triumph, though the struggle towards it was a severe trial to faith, and I see in it signs of as mighty a development of spirituality in this later age, in spite of anti-christ, as has ever perhaps been witnessed. Doubts sometimes take years to solve, but if we refuse to sink into unbelief, that they will eventually be solved to the strengthening and development of our faith has been the constant experience, like that of others, of

A BELIEVER IN HEAVENLY GUIDANCE.

The most distinguished name, perhaps, in the modern literature of Germany (Goethe) declares that "the struggle between belief and unbelief is the only thing in the memoirs of humanity worth considering." May I, therefore, respectfully submit to your consideration a letter received by me from the late Cardinal Manning on the prevalence of modern scepticism?

HUGH ROBERT COLLUM.

The Vicarage, Leigh, Tonbridge.

"ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE, WESTMINSTER, S.W.,

"April 14, 1889.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR—On November 20th last year you were so good as to send me your pamphlet on the state of modern unbelief and a letter; and I have let nearly half a year pass without thanking you. In truth, I was then ill, and though well again now, till the last few days I have not been out of this house. Your pamphlet was

put aside ; but I have read it, and I at last thank you for it. The intellectual confusions and steady decline of faith in certain regions of our national life are always before me. I hope you will continue to write and to collect evidence on the subject. Living in London, I am almost daily in contact with this empty Agnosticism, both in men and in women. The writer who has bewitched the people beyond all men is Darwin. I believe that his whole system is unscientific and false. The autobiographical chapters in his son's life are enough to prove this. The book greatly attracted me to the man, but destroyed him as a man of science. Under his shadow we have a school of pretentious sophists, of whom Grant Allen seems to me to be a fair sample. What Mr. Spurgeon honestly says of the Nonconformists, Lord Shaftesbury years ago told me ; and my experience confirms it. Seeing this aberration on all sides, I wrote some time back the little book ('Religio Viatoris') I now send. The three first chapters, I think, we should hold in common. Do not think I send it with a controversial mind. It seems to me that faith is justified by reason, and reason to justify itself must not rest upon an illogical basis. This is what I find continually to be the *ἀφορμή* of Agnosticism. And when faith is paralysed, the energy of the will is lost. So comes spiritual stagnation, *ab intra et ab extra*.—Believe me, Rev. and dear Sir, yours faithfully,

"HENRY E., Card. Archbp."

Having seen something of the world, I come to the conclusion : (1) That the human being seeks a religion ; (2) That he has power of acquiring a frame of mind in which he can believe ; and (3) That once in that state, the object of his worship is not of first importance to ensure blind reliance. The Hindoo, the Russian, the

Salvationist pray to God with all their heart, and I suggest that the spirit of their supplication (making due allowance for difference of race and teaching) is very much the same. You ask the question, "Do we believe?" and I think the replies you publish show that we do—more or less. But, if we go deeper into the matter, I wonder if the intense love and childlike devotion to a higher Being, so frequently seen in every part of the world, does not arise from this: That people desire to believe, and find comfort in believing in certain deities and doctrines—generally those that prevail in the country of their birth, and in which they have been brought up from childhood.

Hotel de Russie, Marseilles.

TRAVELLER.

In disputations over dogmas, doctrines, ceremonies, and rites, the essence of Christ's teaching has been allowed to evaporate. That is why so many no longer believe. English society thinks it is Christian, whereas, in reality, it is pagan. It requires to be converted quite as much as the Neapolitans and the natives of Borrioboola Gha. There are thousands upon thousands of men and women in London who know no more about Christ and His teaching than so many heathens. Let the clergy take them in hand, and leave the foreigners alone. After all, charity begins at home.

12, Buckingham Street, Strand.

RICHARD DAVEY.

It has always seemed to me not so much belief as the difficulties connected with belief that are so great, so insurmountable. I am writing as a Christian man and from that standpoint. I remember very well walking with a friend the day after Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, was thrown from his horse and killed in an



instant. "Ah," said my companion, "and he (the bishop) had prayed every week for years, 'From sudden death good Lord, deliver us.'" True; and how many like cases since. Lately it was my sad lot to stand by the side of a comparatively young mother, devoted, excellent, and a Christian. She had just learned that she was the victim of a malignant disease which in a few months will have proved fatal. She could only take my hand and say, "My children, my children," from a full heart. Yes, the children are given, but their dearest one is immediately to be taken from them by a cruel disease, while thousands of mothers who are not worthy the name, frivolous, immoral, drunken, are living at ease and their lives go on. Have we an answer to this, or do we, even with the Bible in our hands, "look into a glass darkly"? For centuries generation after generation cries to Heaven ere it goes down to the dust, "Give peace in our time, O Lord," and yet, alas! every generation witnesses to the lust of war and to the great fact that it has not yet pleased the Almighty to answer this constant wail of prayer that has gone up to Him from the hearts of countless millions of His creatures. I am distressed for an answer to this, and cannot find it. Then our Blessed Lord said: "If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto Me"; but how few, apparently, are drawn even in lands where a knowledge of Him is possible! How few even to-day have any knowledge of Him at all compared with the millions whom many believers speak of in a glib way as "perishing." Is it possible that the Son of God—the Saviour of all men—will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied in the salvation of a few who "profess and call themselves Christians"? "Do we believe?" Yes, and thankfully; but there are many and great difficulties connected with belief, too often ignored in a comfortable way by

those who forget the "great darkness" that shrouded "the Cross on which the Prince of Glory died."

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS.

I have been in the position of your correspondent "Anxious." I too have prayed for faith and received no answer for years. His appeal, therefore, touches me deeply. Presumably he has followed the correspondence in your paper. Has he, then, not been struck by the fact that no one can express any belief without some one else saying the absolute contrary? What do we learn from this, if not that human reason is absolutely incapable of deciding anything in the matter? Rationally, therefore, we can never despair because our individual reason seems, however persistently, to show that there is no God. This is what I saw, and I continued to pray. Many years passed before I escaped from what "Anxious" compares to a dark room; but light dawned at length, and now I am astonished when I think how short-sighted, stupid, and bigoted I was when I called myself a Free-thinker. The "inspiration from above" that gives conviction where reason manifestly fails is the most rational of the lights that dawn in the human mind.

NO LONGER ANXIOUS.

I, Holly Mansions, Fortune Green, N.W.

How I wish some of your correspondents could see the altered life of one who did not believe, but now does—thank God, there is a vast multitude of such! Witness the changed lives of men and women in some of the islands of the New Hebrides, &c. On West Tanna, for instance, ten years ago all on that side were cannibals; now there are three chiefs giving each three days a week to journey-

ing among heathen tribes to tell them of the God and Saviour who has changed their hearts and, per consequence, their lives ; other three days they do their work, the seventh, of course, being given to worship and rest. Many have laid down their lives in seeking to win their heathen neighbours. A European said to a Christian native at Fiji, " I wonder an intelligent man like yourself believes all this " (alluding to some Christian doctrine). " Sir," replied the native, " you see that stone ? " " Yes." " Had you come before we knew of the true God you would have been killed on that stone and eaten ! " What other power could or ever has produced such changes ? And these instances could be multiplied by thousands. Is it worth believing in God and His Christ ?

Tooting.

AN OLD BELIEVER.

Permit me, as one who has resided in India for thirty-eight years, and who has had an intimate knowledge of the language, customs, and feelings of Hindoos, to take exception to the statements made by Sir Hiram Maxim and Mr. T. S. Saunders, that the state of their morality is equal to, if not better than, that of Christians. One of their favourite gods is Krishna, whose image is represented as a child stealing a pat of butter. With them to tell a lie is regarded as no offence when it is needed to screen themselves from punishment ; nor is it looked upon as an unpardonable offence to pervert justice by means of bribery. Hence the fountain of justice is defiled at its very source, as is so much lamented by all those whose duty it is to administer it. The religious prohibition against widow re-marriage leads to terrible immorality in Hindoo homes, and not unfrequently to infanticide. On the other hand, Hindoos themselves admit that the high standard of Christian morality that pervades the acts of

Government has been the making of India. It can never be found in their religion.

Bexhill.

W. HILL, Major-General.

My warmest admiration for the noble confession of faith signed by a number of University men. Permit me now to say a word about the letters from Agnostics. Many of these have proclaimed their religion to be the doing of good to our fellow-men. Let me ask those writers what has been the religion of the great benefactors of humanity—Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, Livingstone, Müller, Spurgeon, Quarrier—Bible Christians, every one? I challenge our Agnostic friends to make out a list to compare with this short one—a list, indeed, that could be indefinitely lengthened. True religion does not consist in professing any particular form, neither Protestantism, Romanism, nor any other “ism.” Obeying God is the only true religion, and His command is “This is My beloved Son, hear Him.”

Weston-super-Mare.

W. G.

It is unfair criticism to say we are false Christians because we cannot live up to the standard of a semi-Divine example. Are artists frauds who cannot emulate a Raphael or a Murillo? Unfortunately, however, the mental horizon of the majority is a limited one, and the prejudices and enmities of Churches and sects have disgusted many with those who should set us an example in so-called Christian charity. One does expect an avowed follower of Jesus Christ to have at least as much fellow-feeling for his *confrères* as the local linendraper bears the keeper of the little trimming shop round the corner. As a cosmopolitan, it has always struck me that one of the greatest beauties of the Bible itself is its broad-mindedness



and its marvellous adaptability to suit men of all nations and of all temperaments. The academic sophistries of materialists, who in the end are fain to proclaim themselves disciples of an unknown god, can never suffice mankind to carry them through the trials of life and death. Surely we need a more satisfying and a more generous religion; a religion of brotherhood based on human kindness, and focussed by consistent and open-eyed teachers to the discoveries of modern thought. Cannot the Christian Churches sink their petty differences and give us this?

21, Promenade des Anglais, Nice.

SKENE DHUH.

Having read most of the letters that have appeared on this subject, and having for some years past given no small attention and thought to the matter, may I be allowed to express my views as to why many thoughtful laymen do not attend church and do not believe in many of the clergy who officiate therein? (1) Because so few of the clergy live up to the precepts they profess to teach; (2) Because the musical part of the service is frequently one that the congregation cannot join in; (3) Because the clergy are constantly preaching "the Church" instead of the Gospel; (4) Because too little is made of the Fourth Commandment.

Acton Bridge.

M.INST.C.E.

Christianity stands or falls by an historical fact, the Resurrection of our Blessed Lord. Perhaps one of the best proofs of the genuineness of religion, apart from this, is its power to reclaim mankind from the very lowest depths of vice. Has Haeckel's "Riddle" ever lifted up a poor drunkard and made a new man of him? Could Schopenhauer bring back a ruined gambler on the verge of suicide? Did "The Age of Reason" ever save a poor



Magdalen? Agnosticism and unbelief are not new. The worship of the intellect has been tried. The Greek preached the superiority of the mind, and it was found wanting. Rome deified the body—with what results we know. It remained for Christianity to teach the superiority of the soul.

London.

EVERARD L. RICKS.

Your correspondent, Peter Ramus, describes the great majority of the school teachers of this country as hypocrites who teach, under compulsion, that which they do not believe. A large and familiar acquaintance with my fellow-teachers enables me to assert the exact contrary. The teachers in our schools are believers, and their teaching is conscientiously given.

THOMAS ADKINS, Head Master.

Upper Kennington Lane Council School, S.E.

In this correspondence appears the statement that discoveries in science are inimical to belief. In refutation thereof let me mention two of the greatest natural philosophers—my father, the late James Prescott Joule, and his friend, the late James Clerk Maxwell—who were earnest Christians, and with whom the magnitude of their discoveries did not subvert their belief, but strengthened their faith. Happily, many other distinguished names of those on the roll of science may be added who have been witnesses to the eternal truth.

Northenden, Cheshire.

B. ARTHUR JOULE.

Mr. F. R. Theakstone produced a list of well-known characters in support of the reasonableness of unbelief. To dissect and take the names of contemporary history only—Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Haeckel, and Bradlaugh—is to show proof of the limitations of this reasonableness.

He would be a bold man who contends that the theory of evolution has advanced upon the lines of unbelief since Darwin's death. Spencer's systems are already proving inadequate to cope with the broader outlook of to-day. Haeckel, who attempts to draw definite conclusions whilst admitting imperfect knowledge, points out that Nature's laws are righteous, and that it is required of man to live righteously properly to fulfil those laws, for sin is a violation and thwarts correct fulfilment. Can Haeckel show a force in Nature, when a man realises his unrighteousness, that will assist him to conform to natural law? Can any of the scientists mentioned by your correspondent show a force that will assist a drunkard to reform his ways? Christianity has been proved to possess the power of reforming the vilest offender, and its teachings are illimitable. It would, therefore, appear more reasonable for scientists to accept the claims of belief.

Slip-end, Luton.

H. W. NEALE.

The founding of Alexandria brought Greek polytheistic naturalism, Jewish ideas of revelation, Egyptian mysticism, and Persian paganism together. At this crisis Christianity delivered its message to the world. The Neo-Platonists wove Christian conceptions among the threads of ancient philosophy and produced an altogether new system. Philo's doctrine of the Logos as the idea of the world is further developed; the world-soul is brought into being by the thought (Logos) of the universal mind. The Church Fathers were evidently much under the influence of Neo-Platonic conceptions, and when the creeds of the Christian Church were formulated the doctrine of the Trinity took form. The theory of universal mind gave rise to the belief in the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, who contained all things. The thought (Logos)

of the Neo-Platonists gave rise to that in the Holy Ghost, the third Person, that is made Incarnate in the world-soul, which corresponds to Christ, the Second Person. Thus the religious truths that Christ simply delivered, falling into the hands of a priesthood, suffered, as all truth does, under such conditions. They became crystallised into conventional creeds and clothed in the ephemeral learning of that particular period—a learning, perhaps, suited to that, but not to all ages. But if we feel the doctrine of the Trinity to be thus explained, the position of the Bible is still the same. Every unbiassed mind must admit its peculiar character. No long-winded Koran or other sacred book can compare with it. It is worth all the other books in the world put together. Nor will prayer, as can be testified by many a strange sick-bed experience of recovery of health or reformation of character under its influence, fail to be a moral support so great that a hope, a radiance, an energy, at times seeming due to direct Divine interposition, is inspired by it, as many of your philanthropic correspondents have witnessed. The power of evil, sin, and pain has been argued against the theistic position. Omnipotence can do all that is possible, but cannot compass contradictions. A moral being wills that a world shall be a moral world. To this end its people must have choice of good and evil. Were there no evil choice possible, no good could be made. The presence of pain ministers to such moral training—in ourselves it should lead to self-control ; in others to tender sympathies. “Thy will be done” is the least questionable form of prayer, and Kant’s attitude the noblest : “When I see the starry sky above me, when I feel the moral voice within me, my reason is hushed, I can only fall down and worship.”

A COUNTRY DOCTOR.

May I be allowed to protest against a most mischievous doctrine which appears to dominate not a few of those who have written to you? They seem to think that because they have "accepted" Christ their everlasting beatitude is absolutely assured. If any one ever had good and sufficient reason to look upon himself as certain of Heaven it surely was St. Paul; yet even he was constrained to say, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself become a castaway." But what is the use of multiplying texts? "He that believeth hath everlasting life" is all, apparently, that the "saved" can see in the Bible, and all that they want to see.

London:

A. J. FRANCIS.

I believe with all my heart and thought in Jesus Christ and His doctrines. My creed is not the result of mind's operations, the creed obtained by philosophical and theological studies—one's whole life would not be long enough to study the whole of those works necessary to prove or deny creed—but the result of the real manifestation of God's supreme mercy itself. These manifestations are so real, so visible, that I must believe in spite of myself. Creed is a gift of the Supreme Being, which does not depend on pure reason; one does not reason with creed any more than with love, this other form of creed. And I conclude by thanking God for the gift granted, this gift which makes my life so happy, day by day, in every case—so much so that I would proclaim my faith and its consequence, my happiness, to all the world!

Warsaw.

A FRENCH TEACHER IN RUSSIA.

An interesting name-list was submitted by Mr. F. R. Theakstone, purporting to be that of unbelievers. It



begins with Epicurus and Lucretius and concludes with Sir Leslie Stephen and Bradlaugh. Now let us be at least clear in our reasoning, and not lose sight of the original question—viz., “Do we believe?”—that is, I apprehend, in Christ and His ideals contained in the Sermon on the Mount, or in God as the Creator. The list quoted by Mr. Theakstone is admittedly a formidable one, and most of the characters may be rightly described as “magnificent,” but your correspondent does not say what they did not believe. If he refers to Christianity, I am glad he stated that he had quoted from memory, as his two first names are of men who lived 342 B.C. and 95 B.C. respectively. Although Epicurus was an Atheist, and held the Atomic theory, yet of him, and of Lucretius, of whom very little is known, it may be safely said they do not figure as great human benefactors, and we have no philanthropic results of their Atheism. But my point is that many of the names quoted are of men who, while they professed to be unbelievers in Revelation, were not wholly believers in their unbelief, and, again, others were not Atheists at all. Of course, I am assuming that Mr. Theakstone, by his first two examples, is dealing with the question of belief in God. I would point out that Bruno and Spinoza were not Atheists, and that it is a libel on their names to class them as such. Hobbes declared, as death drew on, that he was “about to take a leap in the dark,” and his writings, according to the Earl of Rochester, were the ruin of many other gentlemen besides that nobleman. Voltaire, the scene of whose dissolution was so terribly depicted by the Abbé Barruel, author of “The French Clergy,” is, I submit, not a bright example of unbelief. Gibbon denounces the hypocrisy of the atheistical philosophers of ancient Rome, comparing them with the Secularists of his day. Thomas Paine perished on a miserable death-



bed, after having earned no enviable fame. When dying he asked a lady who had brought him nourishment if she had read his books. "On being told that she had read a little of them, he inquired what she thought of them, adding, 'I expect a correct answer from such as you.' She told him that when young his 'Age of Reason' was put into her hands, but that the more she read it the more dark and distressed she became, and she threw the book into the fire. 'I wish all had done as you,' he replied, 'for if ever the devil had any agency in any work he has had it in my writing that book'" (Memoir of Stephen Grellet). Tyndall, speaking of prayer, stated, "It is a potent, inward supplement of a noble outward life," and "certain it is that, while many who employ it may be ranked low in the scale of being, yet others who employ it form part of the very cream of the earth. Prayer in its purer form is a discipline which few of us can neglect without moral loss." Huxley wrote: "It is, and always has been, a favourite tenet of mine that Atheism is as absurd, logically speaking, as Polytheism," and that "Denying the possibility of miracles seems to me quite as unjustifiable as speculative Atheism" (*Spectator*). John Stuart Mill, speaking of Jesus Christ, said: "When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer and martyr to that mission who ever existed on earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity. Nor even now would it be easy for an unbeliever to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life" ("Essays on Religion"). I think that the above-mentioned are among the most noteworthy of Mr. Theakstone's list; but, at any rate, I venture to say

that by their words, reasonably considered, they had more faith in God and Christ than in their unbelief. With reference to the "gift" of "reasoning power" and the quotation from Bishop Butler, I would add yet another quotation from the same page: "After all, that which is true must be admitted, though it should show us the shortness of our faculties, and that we are in no wise judges of many things of which we are apt to think ourselves very competent ones" ("Analogy," pt. ii. cp. 3). Well might the Christ say to us to-day as of old: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me" (John xiv. 1).

Ellington Street, N.

SANS DIEU RIEN.

The following letter was addressed by the late Lord Salisbury to the Rev. W. T. McCormick, and was published in the *Egyptian Gazette* of September 17, 1903:—

"REV. SIR—I wish I could assist you; but it is difficult to touch so large a theme in so short a space without doing harm. Every one has his own point of view, from which he looks at these things. To me the central point is the Resurrection of Christ, which I believe. Firstly, because it is testified by men who had every opportunity of seeing and knowing, and whose veracity was tested by the most tremendous trials, both of energy and endurance, during long lives. Secondly, because of the marvellous effect it had upon the world. As a moral phenomenon, the spread and mastery of Christianity is without a parallel. I can no more believe that colossal moral effects lasting for two thousand years can be without a cause than I can believe that the various motions of the magnet are without a cause, though I cannot wholly explain them. To any one who believes the Resurrection of Christ the rest presents

little difficulty. No one who has that belief will doubt that those who were commissioned by Him to speak—Paul, Peter, Mark, John—carried a Divine message. St. Matthew falls into the same category. St. Luke has the warrant of the generation of Christians who saw and heard the others. That is the barest and roughest form the line which the evidence of the inspiration of the New Testament has always taken in my mind. But intellectual arguments, as you well know, are not to be relied upon in such matters.—Believe me, yours faithfully,

“SALISBURY.”

This simple doctrine, coming from a man of such eminence, has cleared the horizon for me. I can only hope it may serve to penetrate through the clouds of some troubled doubter.

Brecknock Road, N.

ROBERT T. HOPKINS.

Mr. Gladstone's reply to a similar question, which I culled from a paper shortly before the great statesman's death, will, I am sure, be of interest to many readers: “Dr. Talmage, preaching at St. Stephen's Church, Sydney, stated that when visiting at Hawarden he asked Mr. Gladstone, ‘As you go on does your faith decrease?’ Mr. Gladstone at once replied, ‘There is only one question in this world, and that is how to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ into contact with the hearts of the people. I have been for forty years connected with the administration of the British Empire, and I have been associated with sixty of the greatest geniuses of the time. Of those sixty, fifty-five were consistent professors of religion, and the other five respected religion.’ He concluded by saying, ‘No doubt my faith increases all the time.’” If I may be allowed to add a personal testimony, I have no hesitation

whatever in bearing witness to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Deliverer from the power and bondage of sin to-day. To those who seek Him with all their hearts, He will still be found of them.

†  
X

Woking.

D. LUCAS.

I think you would be doing good service to those of your contributors to the "Do we believe?" article who want religion without dogma if you would publish the following extract from the writings of that very able prelate, W. C. Magee, late Archbishop of York: "Can anything show you more clearly the utter folly and absurdity of those words, 'Let us have religion without theology, without dogma. By all means let us have religion, but no theology'? Is that one whit more sensible than 'Let us have sun, moon, and stars, but no astronomy; let us have plants, but no botany; let us have chemicals, but no chemistry; let us have the earth, but no geology'? What is theology? The science of God, and if God be a fact—mark you, I say 'if'—there must as certainly come a theology out of the fact, as there comes a geology out of the fact that there is an earth. There cannot possibly be a greater absurdity than for a man to talk of religion without a theology, unless that man by 'religion' means something utterly different from what everybody else means by the word. By religion we mean something that teaches one obligations to a higher Being, and that these cannot be without theology. If there be a God there must be a theology."

HENRY GLOVER, Vicar of Addiscombe.

*Religion is our relationship to a  
Higher Being <sup>and</sup> ~~together with~~ a life  
in accordance therewith.*





SECTION II

*UNFAITH*



## SECTION II

### UNFAITH

SIR HIRAM S. MAXIM

LIKE a great many others, I have been intensely interested in the correspondence which has lately taken place in *The Daily Telegraph*. My early training, my education, and my experience have, I believe, fitted me very well indeed to look upon all religious subjects with an unbiassed and unprejudiced mind. During the greater part of my life there has been a sharp conflict between theology and science, and at least two of the cleverest men of our times have written works on the subject, *vide* Professor John Draper's work entitled "The Conflict Between Religion and Science," and also "The Warfare of Science and Theology," by Professor White, of Cornell University, who is now the American Ambassador at Berlin. Now, as a matter of fact, there is not the least particle of excuse at the present time for this warfare; science, like religion, has its own sphere, beyond which it cannot go. It has often occurred to me that all the religious wrangling of the last century has arisen on account of a misunderstanding of the meaning of terms. Language, like every other human institution, is developed, I might say created, by the people who use it; the correct meaning of words depends on usage—there is no question

about this—and the meanings of certain words are by no means constant. Many examples can be given of this which I will not mention here. The expression “truth” or “the truth” has more than one meaning; if strictly considered, like every other word in the English language, its true meaning in the vernacular has been established by the use it has been put to and the meaning that it conveys in the sentence in which it occurs. Nothing is more common than to say, “As true as the Gospel.” In reading of the introduction of the Christian religion into Northern Europe, we find the expression, “They accepted the Truth,” meaning that they accepted the Christian religion exactly as it was at that particular epoch. The devout Mohammedan always refers to his religion as the “True Faith.” Protestantism has often been referred to in England as “The True Religion.” But the expression “true” or “truth” does not have the same meaning in science that it does in religion. A scientific truth must, in the very nature of things, be an exact truth, otherwise it has no value. When an engineer wishes to take an indicator-card off a steam-engine, he seeks an indicator that will record the exact events which take place in the cylinder; it is the exact truth that he seeks. It is a scientific truth that the two gases oxygen and hydrogen combine at extremely high temperatures and form water; this is an exact truth, and if it were not an exact truth it would be of no value to the chemist. It is a mathematical truth that twice two are four; this is a truth that would be accepted all over the world at all times; even if other planets were inhabited it would be accepted by the people as an exact truth. All scientific truths are exact truths, everywhere and at all times, but the same is not true by any means in regard to religious truths. A religious truth may be considered as a conventional truth instead of an

exact truth. All the narratives in the Bible which are being so much discussed are conventional religious truths, and may be believed by religious people who have no interest in science, exactly as scientific truths may be believed by scientific people who have no interest in religion. It is the greatest mistake in the world to suppose for a single moment that it is necessary for a religious truth to be an exact truth. Religion is not founded on fact, but on faith, whereas, on the other hand, science is founded on fact, and fact alone. Religious truths are not at all the same as scientific truths, and there is no reason why they should be. Then, again, religious truths have both a geographical and chronological boundary, while scientific truths have neither. It is absolutely impossible to point to a single theological truth that has always been true, and will remain true through coming ages ; it is also impossible to find a single religious truth that is not local in its character. No one particular religious truth is accepted by more than a quarter of mankind. It is, therefore, not only useless but foolish in the extreme to combat or ridicule the religion of any people on account of its not being founded on exact truth. I think the letters in *The Daily Telegraph* have shown most conclusively that many people find a great deal of comfort and consolation in believing implicitly that particular form of religion which happens to prevail in England at the present moment, and the same is true of vast numbers of believers in Mohammedanism, Brahmanism, and Buddhism. They find great enjoyment and peace of mind in believing the prevailing religion of their time and country. Why, then, should these devout people be interfered with by either the scientist or the meddling missionary who attacks the faith of others ? I wonder if it has ever occurred to any of the numerous writers whose



letters have appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* that it would be absolutely impossible to found a religion on fact ; it never has been done, and never will be done. The various religions which prevail in England at the present moment are well suited to all sorts of people with a religious turn of mind, and these people are free to select the kind that best suits their particular temperament. All of these religions compare favourably with the many other religions of the world. Why, then, should we not be honest and clever enough to see the point, accept the facts as we find them, and let well enough alone ?

HIRAM S. MAXIM.

P.S.—If writers for the religious Press should see fit to quote from this letter, I hope that they will stick to the exact truth, and not mutilate or misrepresent what I have said.

H. S. M.

Mr. G. Quelch, who has criticised my letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, does not appear to have a very high opinion of exact or scientific truths ; to him they do not appear to be anything like so stable and unchangeable as religious truths. Scientific truths appear to this gentleman to be in a constant state of transition. He says : “ There is no truth so stupendous, no fact so demonstrable, as that upon which religion and the necessity for religion are based.” However, he does not specify exactly the brand of religion he refers to. I cannot agree with Mr. Quelch. It appears to me, after reading a vast number of scientific and historical works, that religious truths are not so stable as scientific truths, and I will give two instances which I think will bear out what I say. Only a few hundred years ago the great Galileo, who invented a telescope, was dragged to Rome and imprisoned and humiliated on account of having discovered certain scientific truths. In

order to save himself from torture and being burnt at the stake he was forced to sign the following declaration : " The first proposition that the sun is the centre and does not revolve about the earth is foolish, absurd, false in theology, and heretical, because expressly contrary to Holy Scripture ; and the second proposition, that the earth is not the centre, but revolves about the sun, is false in philosophy, and from a theological point at least opposed to the True Faith." Giordano Bruno, who taught the same doctrine, when arrested and brought before the Holy Apostolic Inquisition and an infallible Pope, who therefore could not make a mistake, argued that philosophy and religion were distinct, and might be pursued separately. He said that the philosopher in pursuing his studies should not be subject to religious penalties ; that reason and faith went along different roads. But this did not save Bruno from being burnt at the stake by the infallible head of Christianity. At the time these events took place it was certainly a religious truth that the sun revolved around the earth, and it was equally a scientific truth that the earth revolved around the sun. Religion and morality are not at all the same thing, and very often, but not always, bear inverse ratios to each other. The Protestant Prussians are said to be the most moral of all Christian nations. In Berlin less than 2 per cent. of the people attend church. The South Italians and Spaniards have certainly fifty times as much religion as the Germans and a hundred times as much crime in proportion to the population. Curiously enough, the poor Hindoos lead a life more in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount than the inhabitants of any Christian country in the world. Still, these Hindoos are not Christians. Perhaps the best thing that has ever been said on this subject was by the Rev. Samuel Putnam, an American, and is as follows :

"Morality requires no temples, no altars, no ritual, no churches, no Popes, no priests, no Bibles, no gods, no prayers, no sermons. It requires no vast expenditures, no processions, no swelling music, no *auto da fé*, no Inquisition, no torture, and no fire. It does not beg, it does not rob, it does not murder. It demands no sword, no mitre, no crucifix, no pealing bell, no gorgeous pew, no collection-box, no missionary fund. It demands only the common earth and skies, the fireside, the home circle, the genial neighbourhood. It demands only the ordinary highway, the handshake, the good morning, work and happy play, the evening's gentle rest, the voice of little children, and the common sense of all. How happy the world will be when morality prevails, when no rights are invaded, when the inevitable ills of life are met with mutual sympathy ; when self-respect is the universal grace ennobling each and all—the humblest with the greatest."

HIRAM S. MAXIM.

### LADY FLORENCE DIXIE

ONE of your readers writes me as follows :—

"Will Lady Florence Dixie contribute to *The Daily Telegraph* a little of her valuable and courageous opinion ? —IGNOTUS."

If your reader and my correspondent ask my opinion as to whether we "believe," I can only reply that I think a great many people who do not think, and who do not know how to think, undoubtedly do believe, simply and solely because they surrender their common sense into the hands of others and accept implicitly what the misleading education of the day—per pastor and master—metes out to them. As I once stated elsewhere, our youth are

machine-taught, and come out of the schools like a row of sausages or peas in a pod, and it is the same with the religious pupils of superstition. No thinking person can believe, but the person who surrenders his thought to another and rests on faith will believe anything, no matter how silly or impossible that which he is bidden to believe may be. At the same time, there are thousands who do not believe who pretend to believe, both amongst the clergy and the laity, and these are dishonest, either from necessity or from a disinclination to avow the truth. Children believe what they are told up to a certain point, when some brains revolt and refuse to obey the teaching of untruth. Many remain children through life, and these are the recruits which Faith marshals around her. Is not this latter fact a pity? To believe that which is not only impossible, but unproven, is surely a calamity, because morals and customs, whose foundations are rotten, and which are based thereon, must produce evil and consequent suffering. There is only one true God, and that God is Nature. Why, then, teach and enforce a lie stating the contrary? Those who, like myself, will not surrender their thought into the hands of others do not believe the falsehoods of superstition. Only those who rest on faith do. The remainder are humbugs, who, for pelf or convenience, preach or accept a religious curriculum which they know to be a fraud. Asserting my right to think, I refuse to believe the impossible and unproven, and all such who share this feeling do not believe.

Dumfries.

FLORENCE DIXIE.

I have read with interest the letter of "Oxoniensis," and am fully convinced of the un-Christianlike modes of living in the twentieth century. "Oxoniensis" asks, "How can

we believe what we do not understand?" Surely, when a fact is a known certainty, there is no need for a belief in it. For example, we say: "I know or understand that if I pick up a red-hot poker I shall hurt my hand." I do not believe it, I know it for a fact; but I don't know that the sun will "rise" to-morrow, I only believe it will because it always has previously. Again, there is a difference between "belief" and "faith." Faith is more than belief. Most men believe in the existence of a God, and also trust in God—that is, they are to a degree certain that God will protect them. Tennyson shows us the difference between knowledge and certainty in the following words from "In Memoriam":—

"Strong Son of God, Immortal Love,  
When we that have not seen Thy face,  
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove.

\* \* \*

We have but faith: we cannot know;  
For knowledge is of things we see;  
And yet we trust it comes from Thee,  
A beam in darkness; let it grow."

With regard to our efforts to attain to Heaven and avoid Hell, Mr. Lionel Sells writes that our charities, public and private, &c., prove this desire. This may be the case with some men, but I am sure that there are many people who do not believe in the existence of a Heaven or a Hell, and who endeavour to help poor and suffering humanity, not because they expect a reward or fear a punishment in some future world, but simply because they cannot bear to see their fellow-men starving, so to speak, when it is within their power to help them. These are the true Christians.

FREETHINKER.



It seems to me that dissatisfaction with religion is inevitable. Inevitable, because the tenets of religion directly conflict with the instincts and properties of our being. Briefly, the design of Nature appears to be that the various species of animate beings should reproduce their kind in numbers out of all proportion to the subsistence provided for them ; and that in the struggle for existence only the fittest should survive. With human beings the struggle is only one degree less cruel, pitiless, and inevitable than it is with the animal and insect world. Then religion steps in and preaches doctrines that if practised would, in the present condition of struggle for subsistence, spell failure and disaster. Is it matter for wonder that this alien religious influence should suffer when it militates against the successful employment of the weapons with which we are equipped by Nature ?

HORACE W. C. NEWTE.

It is not a question of creeds or dogmas, or "the Faith" with a capital F. It is the broad, simple question—Do the majority of us educated men in this country believe in the existence of a personal God at all ? And I venture to affirm that the vast majority do not. Mind, I don't say that the majority believe that there is not a personal God. What I say is that they are not convinced in their own minds that there is. Very few, comparatively, are satisfied with mere materialism. Almost all of us feel that there must be something behind the infinite phenomena of the universe more than transcendental clockwork. But what ? Is it a real personality who knows and cares for us, and with whom we can communicate, or are we driven back to Omar Khayyám's thoroughly human contradiction in terms—"A Blind Intelligence" ? In short, do we look upon the Author of All as "He" or "It" ? This is no

place for dogma or sectarianism. "Do we believe?" Are we convinced? Honestly? No! For the vast majority it is an open question. And what is the connection between belief and conduct? Why, this. No one denies that the most fervent devotee yields to temptation on occasion. Neither is it questioned that many Agnostics lead upright and honourable lives. But to the majority of us when temptation comes what is it? Making one more exception to a rule which in theory we highly commend, and which in practice, in our normal state of mind, we endeavour to adhere to. On this occasion, perhaps, we make an effort, but after all it is our own affair, and so long as no one else knows, what does it matter? But if we believed in an Almighty Father—an ever-present and dearly-valued Friend, who could read our inmost soul, and whose love would be wounded by our transgression—should we fall as often and as easily as we do? I trow not. We should still have failures at times, but it would require a far greater degree of temptation to make us break the rule. Clearly, then, to say that belief and conduct are entirely independent of each other is nonsense. As for the pessimism of "Oxoniensis's" letter, I fail to see it. Personally, I have generally considered myself somewhat of an optimist. I am inclined to look upon life, with all its ups and downs, as a pleasant thing on the whole, if you take it the right way. I cannot but feel that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs." Nature, with all her apparent cruelty, is yet very merciful, and mankind, as a whole, far from being a fallen creature, I look upon as ever rising and striving, not without success, after higher and nobler ideals. And whatever be the answer to the Great Riddle, I feel assured of this, that if there be a God of Justice and of Love, He will not condemn me to everlasting torment or any

unendurable retribution because I am unable to convince myself of His reality, and so lack the comfort and the moral strength which that conviction would inspire. But, nevertheless, I do look back very wistfully sometimes to the implicit belief of childhood. Gladly would I realise those wonderful words :

“Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit  
can meet,  
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and  
feet.”

But if I essay the task the personality fades away and becomes a focus of cosmic forces, just as a pleasant dream fades on waking and mocks the dreamer's conscious efforts to retain the delusion. What is to be done ? The professing Church of Christ cannot or will not help us.

Devonport.

AN ORDINARY MAN.

A few words from an unbeliever's point of view. “Believers” seem to imagine that our doubts are simply a species of obstinacy ; that we could believe if we would ; whereas it is a case of “we would if we could, but we can't.” A drowning man does not, I fancy, exactly enjoy being buffeted by the waves against the rocks—bruised, battered, his hands torn from each frantic clutch ; and mentally that is what most of us “unbelievers” have to come through. “Religion is a matter of temperament,” and we who are born with the questioning mind must fulfil our destiny. It is useless to cry, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace, though the inquisitors of to-day, as is the custom of inquisitors of all ages, would have us recant our heresies and burn our books. “But the earth moves for all that.” Do “believers” ever remember

a rebuke administered by Christ to John ? We unbelievers, if we have lost faith, cling more closely to hope, "and the greatest of these, Charity." Hoping that "God (if there be a God) will save our souls (if we have souls)."

"Behold, we know not anything.  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last, far off, at last, to all,  
And every winter turn to spring.

So runs my dream ; but what am I ?  
An infant, crying in the night,  
An infant, crying for the light,  
And with no language but a cry."

Kensington.

L. K.

The beliefs on which Christianity is based are unbelievable. It is not that we will not, but that we cannot, believe. The one pivot on which so much rests is the most unthinkable dogma that was ever thrust down the throats of thinking men—viz. : the Resurrection of Christ. We are asked to accept what cannot be comprehended. Master minds like Matthew Arnold rejected it. The most modern and up-to-date *Encyclopædia Biblica* abandons it. Scholars of the highest eminence have bidden it a definite goodbye. Sir J. Seeley, in his "Natural Religion," tells us that "the modern scientific school puts it on one side." In spite of this, the majority in the Church hold it with tenacity, and continue to impose it on men's minds so rigorously that many revolt at it, and turn from the Church and seek solace in solitude, as is so in my own case. If, therefore, the question "Do we believe?" means belief in the virgin birth of Christ, His godhead, His resurrection, and His ascension, the answer must by many of necessity be in the negative. There must be something more real and tangible than contra-

dictory creeds and burdensome beliefs before we can again contribute our mite for the spread of righteousness. Now what has the Church to lose by abandoning the unbelievable? As Sir L. Stephen says: "Is the moral beauty of the Sermon on the Mount diminished or affected in the smallest degree by the fact that it came from human lips?" We could still teach ethics, morality, and righteousness. We should then have a purely ethical religion. Sweep aside the supernaturalism, and it will then be no longer necessary for those who are "perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds" to remain inactive because they cannot accept the inspiration of the Bible, or because it has been demonstrated that man has made his way up from an animal origin, or that the "higher criticism" has shown the Scriptures to be a purely human production. Nor will it be necessary to ask "Do we believe?"

#### A RECENT RATIONALIST.

"An Ordinary Man" points out that "to say that belief and conduct are entirely independent of each other is nonsense," and he gives instances to prove his assertion. I should like to add another. If we really believed in personal immortality, how much moral strength, how much inspiration would lie there to help us to strive for the highest—the ideal—for

"That home of unachieved surprise,  
Where the high failure, not the level fame,  
Attests the spirit's aim—  
And hero hearts by too frail flesh forsworn,  
At last forget to mourn."

When the sorrow of death is on us, when we see the young life snatched away, and know that on this earth can never come the fulfilment of its promise, do not Carlyle's



words ring true? "The realities of life are grown so haggard; life a field of black ashes, if there arise no temple anywhere on it." As pointed out by so many correspondents, we of this century wish to believe, and long for the comfort and power that faith brings, but feel with Carlyle: "What is incredible to thee, thou shalt not, at thy soul's peril, attempt to believe! Else whither for a refuge, or die here. Go to perdition, if thou must—but not with a lie in thy mouth; by the Eternal Maker, No!" I, too, am an optimist, and feel that the Church of each age has its own inspiration. May not ours be—to see above and beyond theological dogmas a spiritual force dominating material things—to trace in the evolution of thought and in our everyday experiences the internal evidences that the law of life is "a just law, and that the soul of it is good"?

Swansea.

AN ORDINARY WOMAN.

I was brought up in the faith of the Church of England, and after attaining years of discretion became immersed in a study of her various dogmas, and the interpretations put on them by the different shades of opinion in her fold. I ended, as it too often happens, by becoming an Agnostic; I had been tossed about by every wind of doctrine, and could find nothing which fell in with my views. Time went on, and everything that happened in the so-called religious world only made me congratulate myself on being in the happy position of an onlooker only. Wherever I looked religious fanaticism was rampant, and dogmatic religion was the cause of most of the strife in the world. That is so self-evident that it is superfluous to give examples either from past or present history. However, I was always seeking for that something which I felt was wanting, when I bethought me to examine the tenets or

basis of Unitarianism. After an exhaustive inquiry, in which I received the greatest kindness and aid from Unitarians, I enrolled myself as one of their society. In my opinion dogma is the prime cause of the present indifference to religious matters, and I am happy to add that that word and "heresy" are not to be found in a Unitarian's vocabulary. In Scotland we have at this moment a melancholy, and at the same time a ridiculous, illustration of the meaning of those words.

Leith.

NAUTA.

Allow me, an ordinary working man, a few lines in this discussion. The dearest recollections of my childhood are of my mother making me say my prayers before putting me to bed. But, as I grew up to manhood and began to look at things as they really were, what did I find? I found—and it is the sad truth—that 75 per cent. of Christians were making use of religion to further their worldly prospects. I have been on jobs in different parts of this country where men got their work, not by merit, but through going to the same church or chapel as their master or foreman; and these men were drunkards, gamblers—and worse. Seeing this going on, not only on one job, but on all, I began to ask myself, Can it be true that a just God would allow all this to be carried on, and especially in His name? And, after years of serious reflection, inquiry, and striving after the truth, I have at last come to the conclusion that there is no Christian or any other God, and that there is not the least evidence in support of a Supreme Being. Some of your correspondents seem to think, and especially the clerical ones, that a working man must go to ruin if he gives up his belief in a Supreme Being. But I may tell them that they will generally find an Agnostic workman true to his word

and honourable in his daily life, and that he wishes that there were a just God who would make each and every one do what is right towards his fellow-man.

Manchester.

AGNOSTIC WORKMAN.

I will try to represent the feelings of a vast number of people who ought neither to be classed as believers, nor, on the other hand, as unbelievers. I have no desire, if I had the presumption, which Heaven forbid, to dispute or question what many good and learned men say is true. It is all a question of belief, for no man, be he a bishop or an ecclesiastic of any kind, can positively know for certain whether or not there is really a Supreme Being. That there is a something which is beyond our comprehension very few would dispute; but, because through the intellect which has been variously given to us, are those who cannot swallow all the tenets as gospel that are preached from pulpits of every description to be classed as Atheists, Agnostics, and Freethinkers? I humbly contend that there is no such being as an Atheist—every man must and does worship something. As to being an Agnostic, or Free-thinker, every man, however orthodox, is either one or the other, because if a man does not know, how can he believe without a great stretch of faith? We are free to think as we like, and, therefore, are all freethinkers, from archbishops to the lowest. What I contend for is to do away with all theology, as “No-theology Rogers” advocated, and attend to all essentials that are taught and understood in everyday life, “to do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you.” That, I contend, is all that is required of a real and genuine Christian man. If that kind of teaching was preached from pulpits more people would attend churches and chapels.

Chesterfield.

AN UNBELIEVER.

Do we of the medical profession "believe"? Brought into contact, in the course of our daily work, with all sorts and conditions of men, with sin and sorrow, suffering and death, brought every day into contact with facts, often of the grimmest description, a kind of physical clergy amongst both rich and poor in a day-to-day struggle with the pale horseman, do we, as a profession, believe? To ask the question, I think, is to answer it. We do not. The doctrine of Atonement, as presented for our consideration and belief by Christian teachers, seems to many a thinking mind quite inadequate to explain the mystery of existence. The punishment of sin, whether mental, or moral, or physical, is inevitable. There is no compounding for sin, no shuffling out of our responsibilities, no shifting the burden to other shoulders. The price has to be paid, and the punishment, though sometimes long in coming, sometimes even striking other heads besides our own, is as inevitable as are the other laws of nature, and the books of the Recording Angel remain inviolate for ever :

"The Moving Finger writes ; and, having writ,  
Moves on : nor all your piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

Is this cruel, is this terrible? No, neither cruel nor terrible; but just. The world is impossible otherwise, and a man once imbued with this great ethical law is careful how he orders his steps in this world, careful how he uses his days of the sun. In place of an anthropomorphic Deity dealing out impossible rewards and impossible punishments in an unjust way, he knows—and the knowledge brings with it unutterable peace of mind—that action and re-action are equal and opposite, and that the Force or Being behind the veil has been, is,

and always will be just in His awards, just in His judgments, inevitably and for ever righteous. The Agnostic's position, as it is the most logical, so also is it the most reverent. To one who humbly studies the wonders around him, the dogmatic confessions and creeds of the Churches appear not trivial only, but impious. The Secret Presence that underlies it all, Force, God, what you will, the Eternal Energy that flings the mighty Sirius into space, that moulds the nebulæ in the hollow of His hand, whose awful power is beyond the plummet of our dreams, surely to think of Him even is presumption, to pray to Him impertinent, and to attempt to enter into His secret councils wicked. Our only attitude can be one of silence, of utter prostration before that tremendous Being, who thundered long ago the question to the trembling Job : "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding?"

London, N.

A. B.

I was brought up as a Christian, and had a Christian training until my early manhood, when, by a diligent study of the writings of Biblical critics, I discovered that the story of the alleged fall of man in the Garden of Eden was a myth, and I asked myself this question : "If man did not fall in the Garden of Eden, what need was there for Jesus to come down on earth and die, that by His death He might blot out the sins of humanity?" The result of my inquiry led me to conclude that "if the first Adam did not fall there was no need for the Atonement by the second Adam"—and the whole *raison d'être* of the Christian scheme of Salvation was gone for ever. But did that leave me without a creed and without a mission in life? Certainly not. True, I gave up belief in the anthropomorphic conception of God as revealed in the



pages of the Bible, and ultimately discovered by a study of the evolution of the God idea that all ideas of God were man-made, and that all the "Gods" were but figments of the imagination. But still I was not without a creed. Everything that was good and true and beautiful in the Bible still belonged to me, as well as it did to any Christian. If I could only believe that Jesus was a man, a noble, enthusiastic religious reformer in His day, I could still practise all the good teachings that He is alleged to have uttered in His Sermon on the Mount. And if I could find any noble ethical teachings in the Koran, or in the teachings of Buddha or Confucius, I could accept them also. The field of practical philosophy was, therefore, widened for me. I could accept the good wheresoever I found it. But if any teachings of Jesus seemed to me out of harmony with the spirit of the age, there was no reason why I should abandon my common sense, and try and practise teachings which would involve me and those near and dear to me in poverty and misery. No. I still had my reason as my guide. Instead of paying homage to the "Gods," I turned my attention to the service of man. I found that the only true philosophy was the philosophy of this life—the only life we really know of, although many of us still dream of a life to come. Well, there is no harm in believing in a future life, so long as we do not allow the concerns of this life to be interfered with by this consideration. What man really wants is a practical belief—one that will make him a good citizen, a good husband, a good father, and a faithful friend. Man wants a creed, but it must be a creed that is based upon science—that is, upon the latest deductions from the observed order of phenomena, and, therefore, it can never be a fixed creed, but must be susceptible of modification, by growth, with every addition that man gets to his knowledge. And it must be

a creed the sole aim of which is the happiness and progress of the human race. And if there should turn out to be another life, no God of goodness can ever blame a man who has done his best to render the lives of others happy in this. As old Polonius said (in "Hamlet") :—

"This above all—to thine own self be true ;  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Camberwell.

A RATIONALIST.

I do not think that any of your correspondents have pointed out that a large number of earnest thinkers are firm believers in the natural evolution of morals, and consider that all theologians, however useful they may have been during the childhood of the race to influence those deficient in social instincts, are now, owing to their fixed character, hindrances and menace our further development. All impartial observers must admit that sympathy and goodness have evolved beyond the need that rewards and punishments in a future state should be held up as an incentive, and are found in different grades of development in individuals and nations quite independent of their theological opinions. A Christian missionary nurse who went through the Pekin Legation siege informed me that the Japanese (who have no theological religion) were the most grateful of all her wounded. Their troops did not take part in the atrocities and thefts perpetrated by some of their Christian comrades, and we are informed that in this present war they are as humane as their Christian antagonists to prisoners and to wounded. The linking of morality on to revelation and dogmatic theology when instructing the young seems to me a dangerous and immoral proceeding ; the inevitable falling away of many from the latter as knowledge increases will endanger the

former. To base morality on the foundation of the truth, that all must recognise its absolute necessity for the continuation of civilised life, is the only way that I can see of avoiding a considerable amount of moral chaos in the near future.

AGNOSTIC OPTIMIST.

It is encouraging to one who has "lost faith" to read in your paper of those who have "faith." I thank God that before this terrible "stoic" feeling came over me, caused by cruelty, wrong, and oppression of man, I had carefully brought up my four children to believe—to be confirmed, to take their Holy Communion—for I never now enter a church to pray. My heart has turned to stone. My children realise the terrible change that has come over me and know that I have "lost faith." I have been a deeply religious woman, and spent my life in good works for, and in working for, the poor. But I cannot see God's wisdom in the chaos of my life and the misery of others, although I must acknowledge a certain providential care. My husband was one of the most selfish and heartless gamblers, though when we married thirty years ago he was the son of one of the county families of England who were amongst the "landed gentry." He spent the whole of his father's inheritance upon the English Turf. Home after home I have seen scattered to the winds, or to the cursed bookmakers, who ruin the hearths and homes of England. At my cruel husband's hands I have passed through every insult it is possible for a woman to know. I would not get a divorce, because of the love I had for my helpless and innocent children, and the details would have been the most terrible revelations of the proverbial brutality of the English husband. Many a time I have been so distracted that I have thought to kill my sleeping little ones and then end my own life. Four times in a

year my husband had the bailiffs in the house, whilst he belonged to the best clubs in town, where he remained the night through, gambling and card-playing. Once when I asked him for money to pay a grocer, who refused to supply more goods, he replied, "I wish to God you would die." My life is not the only one he has wrecked. And how did the world treat me and the children after he deserted us? There is no tribunal for women who are in the position of the widow and fatherless. Good women are driven to the wall, but a fast and disreputable woman can gain all her ends. Truly my experience is that "God made the world," but the devil rules. My children have been driven from "pillar to post." I look back upon unanswered prayers, and my heart has turned to stone for lack of kindness and consideration. I never go to church now; I could not sing the hymns and psalms I once believed in. My life has been a living death, and I long for the end. Daily I see good women driven to the wall and the wicked triumph. The leaders and corrupters of society of our nation are to blame. All the chaos and sorrows of my life have been caused by the leaders of society, who have not the manliness to defend the right. It is with the poor we find God.

Paris.

GAMBLER'S WIFE.

Present me with a reasonable faith, based on reliable evidence, and I would joyfully embrace it. Until that time I have no choice but to remain an Agnostic. One point I would like to emphasise. It is this: By far the greater number of scientific men with whom I have worked or otherwise been brought in contact, although they have told me privately that they are quite unable to accept the doctrines of Christianity, are yet afraid to declare their unbelief. This applies especially to medical men. No



doctor who had the honesty to publicly describe himself as an Agnostic could hope for many patients. He would be branded instantly, at least by the female population of his town, as a "wicked infidel." Christians, on the other hand, are materially helped in worldly matters by their protestations of religion.

London.

MEDICUS.

Yes, I, for one, do "believe." I believe: 1. That, as man knows of no effect without a cause, he is bound to assume that there is a Cause for the universe. 2. That, as man is incapable of understanding anything that has not had a beginning, and equally incapable of comprehending a Supreme Cause that had a beginning, it is idle to think he can ever arrive at a solution. 3. That man is part of the illimitable material universe. 4. That as man has no reason to believe in life before birth, he is not justified in assuming life after death. 5. That, therefore, man should make the best of this world. 6. That to make the best of this world, man should cultivate self-restraint, integrity, affection, and mind improvement. 7. That man's first duty is to provide for those dependent on him. 8. That, after that, he will find great happiness in doing his best for those round about him. 9. That creeds dealing with the nature of the Almighty Cause are impious.

EMANCIPATED SCOT.

"Do we believe?" Certainly. All mankind does so, and necessarily in exactly inverse proportion to a thinking consideration of the matter believed. This follows from an analysis of belief itself, a conscious state graduating from an attitude in which, with intellectual activity at its lowest, emotion is at its highest and belief consequently unconditional and blind, to its opposite extreme, where



the energy of the mind is expended almost entirely in intellectual considerations accompanied by a minimum of feeling, and belief, hence, so completely conditioned or inferential as to merge into certitude. Thus, in all matters of actual objective experience, belief, with all people, at all stages of their history, and all the world over, is practically alike, because all such matter for belief can be clearly represented in thought as having a definite meaning which can be translated, in final analysis, into terms of sense experience, itself practically uniform. The moment, however, actual or inferential experience is exceeded, the emotional element encroaches upon the intellectual, and belief becomes proportionately irrational. Hence it is that children and savages with but a limited experience will believe anything. A countryman cannot be imposed upon with regard to rural phenomena, but will easily credit any others ; our advertisements and newspapers are further instances. It will also be recognised that belief will shift from one end of the scale to the other in proportion to our ability to understand the matter considered—all phenomena arousing wonder, and particularly awe, inspire belief more or less emotional in character, according as we can relate the conditions involved to those of our past experience, whilst in those cases where we not only recognise these conditions, but are able to control them directly or indirectly, the change from an emotional to a rational belief is complete, as when we replace primitive notions about thunder, comets, plagues, &c., as expressions of the feelings of a fetich towards its creatures by the conception of natural law. As religious belief is primarily concerned with notions that cannot be reduced to objective experience, or to rational inference from this (the utmost rational conclusion being suspense of judgment), it is necessarily antithetical to and exclusive of a

thinking consideration of things. For belief of all kinds has the common features of involving at least the predication of the existence of the thing believed; but those matters of which religious belief asserts existence utterly refuse to present themselves in any form that shall convey significance to the mind, and hence preclude the possibility of the necessary predication of existence other than in mere words or sounds of no content, just as we can utter the Berkeleian notion of a "vengeful line," but can attach no meaning to it. Even the most general belief, for example, posits an incorporeal spiritual being, whereas by no manner of means can the term "incorporeal spirit" be brought into relation with the rest of our knowledge so as to retain any sense; that is, so as to present to the mind any matter for its consideration, and hence for its belief. Let any one, Sir Oliver Lodge not excepted, think out for himself the implications of any attribute or act predicable of a spirit, and he will find it impossible to eject from the complete meaning of the terms employed their indispensable relation to a nervous organism, such as we know it, in and through which the mind derives matter for thought, for feeling, and for will, and with which, even in its so-called abnormal states, it is so mysteriously connected as a manifestation. Another notion common to all forms of religious belief is a predication of omniscience, including prescience. Yet an omniscient mind, as all students of psychology are aware, is a contradiction in terms—for a mind, to exist at all, must be active, whereas if there be nothing to which its activity can be directed (since all possible relations between all possible objects of thought are, *ex hypothesi*, already known) there would be consciousness in the absence of mental activity, which is absurd. In short, the contradictions involved in belief are endless, and to any one who is accustomed to try and think

clearly, and at the same time to value his self-respect by refusing to palter with reason, religious belief is impossible—at least, I cannot conceive how belief of this character can be associated with straightforward thinking, saving as the result of self-deception.

West Ealing.

WILLIAM CHEVOB.

I have been interested in the letters on the subject of "Do we believe?" I do not think that an avowed Freethinker has as yet openly written on the theme. I was most strictly brought up, and until I was launched on the world, at the age of seventeen, was a regular hypocrite, pretending that I thought theatres and all worldly pleasures a sin. I am now advancing on middle-age, and have read deeply and travelled far, mixing in all sorts of society at home and abroad, and from the observations I have made I honestly believe that not eight people in ten have any religion, only they are ashamed to confess it, because it is not the fashion to say you are an Atheist. Why should not an Atheist be a loyal subject and a moral man? Nine-tenths of mankind are kept from crime by the fear of the law, not the fear of God. People write of the comfort and hope of religion, and yet those who really believe are haunted by the fear of a punishment beyond the grave, for themselves or their loved ones. How can any educated and well-read man believe in the deeds of Samson, the falling of the walls of Jericho, or Joshua's standing still of the sun? I think the Atheist who leads a good and kind life and helps the poor and needy is far happier than the fussing and fretting follower of religion, as he has no fear of the future, and holds that death ends all things. One simple question that I have often asked clergymen and other religious people, and have never got an answer that meets the case, is this; Why, if God is all-powerful, does

He not make all things work for good? Why does He allow war, pestilence, disease, poverty, starvation, and crime to stalk rampant over the earth?

Aylesbury.

AN ATHEIST.

I have believed for over twenty years (from the age of seventeen to thirty-eight), and can conscientiously say I was sincere in the belief I held, which was completely orthodox. After this period I had occasion to question some of the preachers regarding the foundations of our Faith, but could never get satisfactory replies. This made me think. Since then I have gone thoroughly into the matter for myself, always with the one desire to know the truth at any cost, and after studying ancient history—especially Egyptian and Chaldean (which date from long before the Bible Adam)—I found it disclosed the source from which much in the early Bible history was borrowed (though said to be Divine revelation). Now, I do not believe, because my God-given reason will not admit of my doing so.

Erdington.

TRUTH AT ANY COST.

The son of a Free Church of Scotland elder and the brother of an Indian missionary, some thirty-five years ago, when about the age of thirty, I eliminated, or tried hard to eradicate, from my mind finally all cant and dogma and fear. During recent years I have adopted and adapted from various authors five portions, or sets, of ideas bearing on the mystery of things, the riddle of the universe. These may not be wholly true; they certainly do not wholly exhaust the truth; they are the best guesses at truth that I have met with. Modestly and with reverence I do not profess to know. I fearlessly think, and I honestly believe.



1. The first has four corner-stones and a theory : (a) Matter, substance cannot be destroyed, cannot be annihilated ; (b) force, energy cannot be destroyed or annihilated ; (c) matter and force cannot exist apart. No matter without force, no force without matter. Matter and force are not two entities, they are two phases of one entity. They are two sides or two different manifestations of one reality. (d) That which cannot be destroyed could not have been created. The indestructible is the uncreatable. Theory : Nothing has been, or can be, created. There never has been, or can be, a Creator. Matter and force are from eternity to eternity. They cannot be increased or diminished. Nature is the totality of everything there is. Everything that is, every being that is, is a fact in Nature. The supernatural does not and cannot exist.

2. Consists of five thoughts on the Christian religion : (a) History disproves the alleged fall of man. (b) Evolution substitutes for it the rise of man. (c) Science has knocked the bottom out of Hell. (d) Philosophy has killed the Devil. (e) Reason and common sense, when freed from fear and prejudice, see in the Christian scheme of salvation only nonsense.

3. The order and energy of the universe I hold to be inherent, not imposed from without.

4. The human inhabitant of this world, humanity, is but a transitory phase of the evolution of an eternal substance—a particular phenomenal form of matter and energy ; the true proportion of which we soon perceive when we set it on the background of infinite space and eternal time.

5. Where one world—say, our beautiful mother earth—is but as one grain of sand on the Portland to Abbotsbury pebble beach, or, more correctly, on a limitless shore, to



what sufficiently insignificant is it possible to compare one life ? One human life—one among 1,500 millions now alive. Before long Yeovil people will say of old Moffat, “He has passed over to the majority.” Think of that majority ! Think of the innumerable myriads of human beings who have lived and are dead ! I shall be there soon, and our mother’s bosom will screen us all.

“Ah ! within our mother’s breast,  
From toil and turmoil, sin and sorrow, free ;  
Safe, beyond hope and dread, serenely calm,  
We sleep, all gathered into perfect rest,  
And o’er the haven of our eternity  
The cypress waves, more holy than the palm.”

Yeovil.

JAMES MOFFAT.

I am in the position of sincerely wishing to believe, but my reason refuses. I cannot understand why God has for nearly 2,000 years (at any rate) left the knowledge of even His existence to hearsay evidence only, whilst at the same time, according to the Church, intending to punish unbelief everlastingly. This to me seems so unreasonable and unbelievable, and also altogether contrary to the Church’s conception of a merciful and just God. Another point which troubles me is that I can find no better evidence for accepting Christ than Mahomet or Buddha.

Norwood.

A RELUCTANT UNBELIEVER.

In answer to this question, I believe that human activity of the mind, as well as the body, is limited to this life. Beyond the known I decline to go. One life at a time is enough for me. If there is a future state, we shall not be punished for being unable to believe it. I believe in the universe as my Bible, and in the religion of humanity, of justice, of reason, and of love, the only priest. I regard

the Christian Bible as a collection of purely human writings, and its theology as a deadly enemy to the progress of the human race. But evolution is actively at work. Only a few years ago Mr. Gladstone attempted to defend the accuracy of Genesis. Yet now the "Encyclopædia Biblica" denies the accuracy not only of Genesis, but of every other book in the Bible as well. John Wesley said that to give up witchcraft was to give up the Bible. If he were right the Christians of to-day give up both. Modern Christianity is steadily, but reluctantly, accepting the Bible's human origin. We do not hear Hell preached now, except by the Salvation Army and the apostle Dowie. This correspondence in a great daily newspaper, filling four columns every day for a month, is a proof of this. A few years ago such a phenomenon would have been impossible. Christianity and supernaturalism are on their defence. The spirit of doubt is about, and the priests are only too conscious of the difficulty of answering. As the knowledge of the real history of Christianity and its place in the evolution of religion is acquired, so the rationalist creed increases, for rationalism has a positive creed, which supplies impulses and ideals in place of those offered by an abandoned supernaturalism. It provides a faith far more tenable to the educated mind and also more satisfying and inspiring to the human heart. It is not "wistful and sad-eyed," as "Oxoniensis" absurdly imagines. The Christian ideas of other-worldism and its fears of fate beyond the grave have produced the very need of consolation which it is called upon to satisfy. Those who abandon the fears as well as the hopes of supernaturalism do not seem to feel the want of the soothing doctrine to which the "happy" Christian clings so pathetically; they cherish rather the great quality of courage and the virtue of human sympathy. The great hope for the human race

is in science, liberty, and freedom of thought. These are the mortal enemies of the supernatural creeds.

J. H. GARTRELL.

As a child I was brought up in the faith of the Church of England, and believed everything I was told. At school I went to chapel regularly and took prizes in Divinity—thinking little and caring less. At the University I attended the services of a large number of different creeds, and wondered much at the diversity of opinions expressed and the exceeding bitterness there was between the followers of different sects. As a medical man I travelled very widely, meeting people of all ranks and faiths, from the rulers of first-class European Powers to the humble Chinese coolie. For years I lived among Buddhists, Mohammedans, and other “heathen,” studying closely both the theory and practice of their different faiths. I have seen missionaries from almost every nation in the world at work in the “mission field.” I have met with death in every shape—at the bedsides of princes and paupers alike. Theists, Atheists, Agnostics—I have seen them all die. Now in middle life, looking back upon what I have gone through in a hard, practical, broad-minded school, I am confronted with the question, “Do you believe?” In all honesty I have to confess that in my humble opinion the verdict is with the Agnostics. Certain it is that the solution of the greatest of all questions, “Is there an all-powerful Creator and Ruler of all the universe?” is beyond the comprehension of any human being.

KISMET.

The inevitable tendency of this correspondence will be to clear away a great superstructure of cant and hypocrisy based upon ignorance and credulity, and to turn men's

thoughts and aspirations to the betterment of humanity at large. So may it be. Speaking for myself, I am a man who has had to battle hard for a living, with little assistance from others. I can only say that, after the most earnest search for truth as formulated by the Christian Churches, I do not believe. My reasons may be briefly summarised as follows: The atrocities perpetrated by the so-called Christian nations in all ages on the natives of the countries that they have invaded or conquered (it is only necessary to mention Mexico, Peru, Africa, and, in our own days, China, Manchuria, and the Congo State); the devilish tortures and barbarities inflicted by the Inquisition on the innocent; and the fact that the priest in most Churches has ever been the willing ally of tyranny. If I add to these strictures the hypocrisy and want of candour displayed by the great bulk of the clergy in ignoring the scholarly criticisms upon the books of the Bible, and teaching what it is difficult to assume that they really believe, I feel that I cannot shape my beliefs and actions upon the teachings of such dishonest guides, but prefer to rely for pardon and acceptance upon my love for my fellow-men. I should be sorry, however, if I failed to do justice to the self-denying labours of many Christian workers, who have spent of all they possessed for their Master's sake. They are, unfortunately, only too few.

STEELPEN.

Probably believers are hardly aware of the large number of thoughtful women who do not believe. These women do not cry their inmost thoughts on the housetops, for fear of hurting the feelings and prejudices of believers. They often attend a Christian place of worship, clinging to the observances of their youth; or they may keep their views to themselves, for fear that their actions would be mis-



judged and themselves shunned by otherwise the nicest people, perhaps by those they love. This lack of honesty is damaging to the character, and yet it is just as damaging to the character to ride rough-shod over other people's opinions and prejudices. This is the great problem that I find in my own existence—How to balance truth with consideration for others. I, a woman, was myself till twenty-five years of age a firm believer in orthodox Christianity. I lived my religion all hours of the day, and was continually praying and giving of thanks. I read books on theology, and gradually grew broader in my views. Then I studied science and grew broader still, till at length my belief in orthodox Christianity was shattered. I fought against unbelief with every weapon I could master, but without avail. At first my whole motive in life seemed gone, and I felt that the morals which had hung upon that motive must go too. For a long time I was absolutely miserable. I have recovered. I never pray now. I only feel and think and act. But I am sure all who know me would say that my character is superior now to what it was then, because it is richer, more sympathetic. I may also say that I do not find resisting temptation any more difficult, relying on my own strength, than I used to do when I prayed for help.

London.

AMCEBA.

Might I reply by putting the question, "Are we justified in believing things that, on the face of them, appear improbable, unless strong evidence for such belief is given?" For instance, are we justified in believing the Bible account of the origin of "sin," which is based on the superstitious beliefs in devils, if we can give a fair explanation for its origin on natural grounds based upon the theory of evolution? It seems to me that the origin of sin is the



natural outcome of personal struggle for existence opposed to the good of the flock or herd of gregarious animals. Death, again, can be explained as an instrument for the public good, to prevent overcrowding and to allow of improvement. It is certainly not a curse. I maintain that truth, and truth alone, will stand the severest tests, and the capacity of a religion for standing these tests is in direct proportion to the truth contained in it. It has been said (by whom I forget for the moment) that "the world does not want Christianity, or Buddhism, or Islam, but the world wants the truth." This seems to be a very sound statement, and it would be a very good thing for mankind if we studied religions other than our own. We should stand a much better chance of arriving at the truth if we did not restrict ourselves to the study of one religion only. After all, the main thing is to have high ideals and to act up to them. Personally I have firm belief in the universal law of cause and effect, and therefore believe in a First Cause of the world, Who will at some future date bring everything to perfection through the direct agency of natural laws.

Cambridge.

A MEDICAL STUDENT.

"Do we believe?" Yes, certainly—but in science rather than in religion, and in work rather than in prayer. We also have faith—though it is a faith founded on ages of accumulated human experience, not the faith of the Christian. And on these all our conduct in life is based—even morality itself. For there is no such thing as sin against God; what theologians call sin is nothing more than the infraction of certain social laws that are essential to the well-being of society as a whole. Place a man on a desert island, away from human intercourse, and he becomes incapable of committing any sin. I have

said that we all believe in science. What, let me ask, does the most believing Christian do when he is suddenly taken ill? Does he not at once send for a doctor, and quite overlook the parson, until the former, representing science, declares he can do no more for him? Again, would he care to cross the Atlantic in a vessel manned by a crew who, if models of Christian piety, knew nothing whatever of the science of navigation? No, the fact is, we profess religion, but have no real faith in it; and the plain evidence of this is that in all mundane affairs we are guided solely by scientific knowledge and past experience. In these only can we, therefore, make any pretence of believing.

Hither Green.

H. C. PARLOW.

There are thousands throughout the country who, like myself, are unable to "believe," but who were at one time thorough believers, and did their utmost to persuade others to believe in salvation by faith in Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and who quite accepted the "inspiration" idea. No tongue can tell what one has to suffer who happens to be a conscientious unbeliever; quite recently a whole sermon was directed against me in the ward in which I live, two days before a municipal election in which I was seeking re-election to our council chamber. A crowded congregation was urged to vote only for those who were "not ashamed to call themselves Christians," but as this happened after twenty-nine years of life amongst the very people to whom the appeal was made, it had no effect. My first doubt was caused by a sermon delivered by the late C. H. Spurgeon about thirty-four years ago. I was at that time a member at Regent's Park Chapel, whose pastor was then the Rev. Dr. Landells. The sermon I refer to was meant to prove both the

doctrines of "predestination" and "free-will." The preacher, after enlarging upon these separately, said he could not understand them, but he was bound to believe them, because they were "there," striking the Bible at the moment. The agony of mind through which I passed for years afterwards, as doubt after doubt arose before me, only those who have had similar experience can understand. Still, I kept on as a local preacher, and was quite a successful "infant-class" Sunday-school teacher, until one Sunday, when I was walking seven miles out to preach, more doubts pressed themselves upon me. I stood still on the road and asked myself the question, "Who was it who stated first the Bible was inspired?" This question did not leave me—I put it to all sorts of people. I could not dismiss the thought that if the Almighty gave inspiration He would never leave it to men to decide what was inspired and what was not. And none can deny that in the compilation of the Bible this is exactly what happened.

Stamford.

CHARLES CADE.

What strikes me most is the common reference to so-called "infidel" books. They are compared to "poisonous food," and spoken of as though "burning" was the only right fate for them. Has it never occurred to any one's mind that perhaps these "infidel" books, and those who share the opinions expressed by them, may not be so black, so wicked, after all? Perhaps they may be right. Galileo and Copernicus were denounced as "infidels" in their times—but they were right. Is it not possible that "infidels" may be, after all, not merely "scoffers" and "wicked," but seekers of truth?—and may they not, perhaps, be right? Yes, it is my opinion

that we do "believe" ; but it is in "the paramount importance of truth" that we believe.

Hornsey.

INCOLA.

In trying to discover what this word "belief" is generally understood to mean, I find it is that which rests upon authority, or something quite outside the mind. Sir William Hamilton says, "We know what rests upon reason, we believe what rests upon authority." To believe in anything does not mean that what is believed in is true. Paul said, "I know in whom I have believed." This implies that belief comes before knowledge, but must belief always precede knowledge? I venture to say the chief aim of most religious minds is to believe, and they think it is the end of religion, whereas belief is only the means. It is knowledge that will govern the standard of man's ideas of right and wrong. As the mind grows, develops, and takes a wider view of existing things and conditions, it will itself create its own ideal of life. This ideal is much like a dissolving view, doomed to decay as soon as created. The process of mental growth is so slow as to be unperceived, and no one can say how ignorant they were a year ago. The meaning of growth is that change has wrought havoc with past conditions of life, and new and better ones have come into existence. The ideal which was once the high becomes the lower, and thus "we rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things." Jesus' ideal is set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. Are our courts of justice based upon that sermon, or does that ideal of Jesus harmonise with our human sense of justice? I believe a certain course of action will lead to a better state of things, and I follow it and I become convinced of its truth. In a day or two I come across another, who tells me if I do not believe as he believes



and do as he does I shall be punished for disbelieving and disobeying. The Scriptures promise punishment to the disbeliever, and here arises the question of authority. Punishment is useless unless it is a deterrent ; if that is not the object, it becomes revenge. Jesus says, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth has been the custom, but I say resist not evil." Do we believe this? I think we do not. We are bound by inexorable laws which, in nature, always give an adequate punishment (deterrent) to every violator of them. I see a law in the mental processes, and this law has to be obeyed. To the believer in a "particular Providence" prayer is the available helper, but, like the thoughtful writer who signs herself "Amœba," I, too, cease to pray. Knowing there is a law throughout nature, I do not see how prayer can any more avail in desiring and trying to live nobly than if it were utilised for the purpose of desiring and trying to rise in the morning in time to catch a train.

Chiswick.

A SEARCHER.

As there appears to be a good deal of misapprehension with regard to the Atheist position, I should like to state clearly that Atheists do not assert that there is no God, but confine themselves to saying that there is no evidence of the existence of a beneficent Almighty, who interposes in human affairs, but plenty of evidence to the contrary. They ask how it is possible to reconcile the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent Deity with the horrors of war, plague, famine, and the countless other ills that beset the path of mankind. To say that these evils are for our ultimate good is to beg the question. Surely an Almighty Power could have attained the same ends minus the suffering. As to whether the world had a Creator, Atheists



plead complete ignorance, and throw upon Christians the onus of proving the unprovable.

Liverpool.

AGWEM.

While expressing the opinion that this question is correctly answered in the negative, I have pleasure in accepting the challenge of "W. G." The following list of unbelievers, from memory, and by no means complete, will bear comparison with that tabulated by him, viz.: Epicurus, Lucretius, Bruno, Spinoza, Hobbes, David Hume, Voltaire, Gibbon, Holbach, Thomas Paine, Darwin, Tyndall, Huxley, Clifford, Spencer, Büchner, the two Mills, Haeckel, Ingersoll, Sir Leslie Stephen, and, not least, Charles Bradlaugh (whom an eminent judge recently described as one of the clearest-headed men of his time in the House of Commons). It is important to observe that all these magnificent characters were, or are, gifted with a high order of reasoning power, which, as Bishop Butler declared, "is, indeed, the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even Revelation itself" ("Analogy," pt. ii. cp. 3). It should also be borne in mind that the issue involved, so far as the Agnostic is concerned, is purely one of truth, and, however admirable the persons named by your correspondent may have been in their respective spheres in the game of life, the beliefs of philanthropists, preachers, and explorers furnish no proof in support of the truth thereof. It was Isaac Watts, D.D., who declared that "evidence is the great criterion of truth" ("Logic," p. 138). The following excerpt from the pages of a religious contemporary will, perhaps, be regarded as ample corroboration of the opinion expressed in my opening remark: "It has often been the shame of the Christian Church that its standard has been so low. . . . Numbers of our churches win no accessions to their

membership save from among those who are already adherents" (*Examiner*, Sept. 18, 1902).

Dulwich.

F. R. THEAKSTONE.

"Peter Ramus" says in his letter: "It is important that we should know the opinion of our teachers, to whom is entrusted the imparting of orthodox ideas." I am headmaster in a village Church of England school. I have to teach such things as Mark vi. 56: "And as many as touched Him were made whole." I don't believe that Jesus Christ did this or any one of the other miracles attributed to Him. Strange to say, my unbelief has gradually grown upon me as I have taught these things over and over again. I know that many, if not most, of the teachers in the Church of England schools are longing for the time of religious freedom in the schools. Let those who are paid for teaching religion, viz., the clergy, and also those who volunteer to teach religion, teach it. But no man should be compelled as a means of getting a living to teach (along with other things he can understand) something he can neither understand nor believe.

#### STRAIGHT II.

The list of unbelievers who have been great benefactors of humanity may be increased by the names, among others, of Montaigne, the initiator of free thought; Socrates, the deadly foe of cant; Carlyle, the hater of shams; George Eliot, the greatest English woman writer; Robert Owen, the friend of the working man; Descartes, the philosopher; and Priestley, the great chemist. It is scarcely necessary to point out that great men, whether philanthropists or benefactors of mankind in some less direct manner, dissemble their opinions for various reasons. Think for a minute of the subtle duplicity of which such a master

mind as Lord Bacon was capable. Think of the mental gymnastics of which advanced theologians have been capable. Expediency rules, not truth.

Blackheath.

SIGMA.

May I as a sincere seeker after truth inquire of your "believing" correspondents where they imagine such places as Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory can be situated? Are they in the clouds or in the earth? Wherever they are their forces must be so enormous that surely they must give some token of their presence. My own belief is that just as when the "body sleeps the soul sleeps," so when the body dies the soul dies too. And surely this is far better and more just than that we should be either rewarded or punished eternally for the actions of our brief life here. Reincarnation on earth is, perhaps, the most reasonable of ideas associated with a future life, but I fear this also would be hardly advantageous in practice, though preferable to the modern Christian idea of Heaven and Hell.

Spaldwick.

CHARLES LLOYD.

There is a comfortable feeling amongst orthodox believers that Agnostics are few and far between, and that they are duly ashamed of their position. On both points nothing could be farther from the truth. I believe that this opinion is fostered by the fact that there is scarcely any Agnostic propaganda, and that Agnostics do not go about battering theology to pieces. But why should they? If some one asserted that Cæsar had some extraordinary gift, as, for example, the ability to fly, would mankind at once set to work to disprove the assertion? Not a bit of it. Mankind would at once ask for some

"reasonable basis of fact" for the statement, and until that were forthcoming would not further trouble their heads about the matter. That is precisely the Agnostic's position in regard to religion. The whole of Christian theology and dogma is based upon alleged events absolutely "outside the experience" of mankind, and it is for the believer to justify his belief by a "reasonable basis of fact," not for the Agnostic to waste time and energy in disproving assertions which, if the general tendency of thought be maintained, will require no more disproof in a few years' time than the belief in witchcraft does now.

Uxbridge.

REHSIF.

I have earned my living in four different countries, and have consequently come in contact with people of different creeds, temperaments, and dispositions, though chiefly belonging to the working class, and it is my unbiassed opinion that the majority do not believe in the real sense of the word. I have always found that men were guided not by faith, but by fear. I want to ask a simple question, which must be uppermost in many people's minds: "What should we believe, and does it matter if we do or not?" Should we, to be saved, believe that Christ was the Son of God? What about the innumerable legions who were born before Christ? How were they saved? I maintain that a man who behaves as a man ought to, for the sake of being manly, who is as charitable as circumstances and surroundings will permit him to be, one who will try to "do unto others as he would like them to do unto himself"—such a man ought not to fear anything. And as far as the peace of mind which some of your correspondents say religion or belief causes is concerned, I only wish that all so-called good Christians had as peaceful a mind as mine is on this subject. I simply try to live as honest a life as I

can, and I care not a jot whether there is a God or not. In conclusion, I will say that so long as I see so many scoundrels succeed in life, and so many honest and persevering men and women fail ; so long as I see so much crime, poverty, misery, suffering, and iniquity in the world, I shall never believe that there is an All-powerful, good God who loves us better than a father loves his children.

Camden Town.

L. CHARPIAT.

“Oxoniensis” remarked, “I know that there are serious Agnostics who have tried to think out problems for themselves and have conscientiously attained to conclusions mainly negative.” As one thus referred to, I should like to mention that many years elapsed ere I arrived at the conclusion that Old Testament history was unreliable, and rejected it as being so. Subsequently I was led to give the New Testament closer consideration, and in time came to the conclusion that the so-called Gospels were scarcely more reliable as establishing the Church’s doctrine of the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection than was the Book of Genesis in the case of the Fall. It also came to me that the real author of Christianity, as known in the early Churches, was Paul. Having ceased to accept the Biblical account of the Fall of man, and considering the Divine origin of Jesus not proven, I could no longer agree to Paul’s doctrine of the Resurrection, and came to the decision, for myself, that revealed religion was something not yet found on earth, but that the thoughts and teachings of good men are many, and that the Sermon on the Mount, practically and reasonably construed in unison with modern Occidental life, and Paul’s advice to the Philippians (iv. 8), “Whatsoever things are true,” &c., constitute a safe rule of life, which will give happiness in life and peace at death. In the



present I am satisfied ; for the future, I subscribe myself, with confidence,

Hove.

ONE WAITING.

The narrow prejudice exhibited by confessed believers and their attitude in general towards unbelievers is certainly very deplorable and most unchristian. No one can be made to believe by order. Our conscience decides our belief or disbelief. When I was twenty years of age I definitely came to the conclusion that it was impossible for me to entertain the idea of a Deity. My unbelief was greatly regretted in the home, but it was generously tolerated, my people not being bigoted. I was more fortunate than a friend of mine, who was turned out of doors by his Christian father on account of his (my friend's) unbelief. It is impossible for any intelligent, sane, and responsible person to conceive a better moral code than that given to me by an uncle. Said he, "Act square with your fellow-man, and do a good turn when you have the opportunity." My uncle was an unbeliever. An hour before he died I asked him if he had changed his views of a future life. His reply was, "Bunkum, dear boy, bunkum !" Is it impossible for Christians to cultivate a little common sense and to allow others to hold their own views? The unbeliever does not quarrel with the Christian because he holds different views. To say that with the lapse of belief in Christianity morals evaporate is laughable when we have everyday evidences of crime committed under the cloak of Christianity. Man does not know what moral responsibility means until he puts aside Christianity. "To act square with your fellow-man, and to do a good turn when you have the opportunity," is a religion that many Christians might well follow.

H. MONTGOMERIE.

The overwhelming majority of your correspondents believe blindly, implicitly, in the Old and New Testament. We know that thousands of Christians, Catholics and Protestants, who still believe in God have ceased to believe in the Son of God, but might they not believe in Jesus Christ as the kindest and noblest and purest preacher that ever lived? I confess that it is as easy for me, as a Jew, to believe in Jesus as to believe in Moses. Moses was, to my mind, the shrewdest and cleverest legislator of all times. The Code Napoleon is nothing but child's play when brought in line with the immortal Code Moses. Jesus, as I have said, was the most ideal preacher of all times; His teaching and His preaching were simply sublime, because they were preceded and followed by acts; He personified His sermons. His whole life told us that believing without acting was just as good as not believing at all. Now was it the fault of Jesus if His simple, yet divinely-inspired words were twisted by His ecstatic followers to such an extent that they came down to us like unfathomable riddles that no mortal ever solved, that no human being will ever solve? Alas! I am neither as clever as Moses nor as good as Jesus, yet I know and I feel what true religion is, and I believe that those who merely obey certain commandments that teach us what we are not to do are intentionally followers of that comfortably passive religion which calls for no sacrifices; they are very insipid Christians, religiously lukewarm. Jesus, on the contrary, taught only an active religion. I am equally happy to state here that a fair proportion of my own co-religionists are certainly truer Christians than many so-called Christians. Is science really needed to make religion palatable and understandable to us? No, it is not, for we have our reason, our conscience, our

heart, that natural trinity, which should help every man and every woman to feel what to do and what to leave undone. The religious dictates of reason, conscience, and heart are as clear as daylight : (1) Be pure in mind, (2) be good, sincere, and just, which is the essence of all morality, (3) do as much good as your powers and your means permit. Whoever believes in that religion is not likely to feel perplexed.

Epernay.

MAX MAHLER.

PS.—I am told that in England they are subsidising a society which has nothing better to do than to convert Jews to Christendom. If that be true, then it proves to me that, as a nation, you are possessed of splendid humour !

In answer to one of your correspondents I desire to say that the teaching and preaching of Jesus were sublime and divinely inspired ; but I believe quite as much of the Code Moses, of the works of Raphael Sanzio, Shakespeare, or Mozart. No, I do not believe in Jesus as the Son of God, but as a son of God—just as we are all sons of God, and I add, “We and our Father are one.” I said very clearly and precisely in a former letter that Jesus is not answerable for—as I believe—the fact that His simple words were distorted by His ecstatic followers. I affirmed then, and wish to repeat, that, although a Jew, I recognise no more a Jewish religion than I recognise a Christian religion. The true religion, which Christians and Jews alike should follow, has no name. It is the natural outcome of reason, conscience, and heart. Its dictates are threefold : (1) be pure in mind ; (2) be good and just, sincere and honest, which is the essence of all morality ; (3) do as much good as your powers and means permit. And I added : “Whoever follows that nameless religion

is not likely to feel perplexed." As only really good men follow it, "H. F. W." and the Society for the Conversion of Jews to Christianity really waste their splendid humour, their energies, and their superfluous cash. Would they carry coals to Newcastle-on-Tyne?

Epernay.

MAX MAHLER.

We are often triumphantly asked : "Would the teachings of Haeckel, Huxley, and Bradlaugh lift a drunkard out of the gutter and reclaim him?" I do not suppose they would. I cannot by any stretch of the imagination fancy a drunkard coming under the influence of these authors, who intended their writings for the only people capable of appreciating them, namely, the sober, intelligent, and thoughtful—the backbone of a community. There is a greater work to be done than even reforming an individual drunkard here and there. That is, to arouse men to a love of truth and a hatred of error and to a true sense of citizenship. This would ultimately result in a sane society, based on justice and reason, in which drunkards would not be so readily manufactured as now. By reading the works of Haeckel and others like him, men will cultivate their minds, will be able to distinguish between scientific truths and dogmatic assertions, and will be no longer disposed to look upon docile, unquestioning credulity as the highest human virtue.

Birkenhead.

LOHENGRIN.

Do we believe that the human brain was given to us (as an intelligent reasoning faculty) to use and develop to the best of our ability, or do we not rather, speaking generally, believe in the doctrine of allowing our intelligence to lie dormant and permitting others to think for us? Not many years ago I remember asking an elderly

Sunday-school teacher if he was aware that our little planet was not the only one in existence, and that in fact, if he cared to look through a telescope, it was possible to see a planet called Saturn which had eight moons to our one. That pious teacher flatly contradicted me. Why worry ourselves into an early grave concerning the possibilities of some "future life" of which we know absolutely nothing, when "right here," as the Americans say, we have a real life, of which at least we know something? Why, again, should rank demoralising fear be the dominating influence of a man's religion? And, again, why should I believe without question the writings of men of a bygone age, whose knowledge of their own world was centred in and around the continent of Asia? The ordinary Christian person one meets with in this country appears to live in the narrowest of grooves mentally. He is like a man travelling down a narrow lane with a high wall upon either side of him—absolutely ignorant of the great universe on the other side of those high walls, since he is too bigoted or too lazy to get a ladder (the ladder of science) and see what is going on outside his own narrow conception of things. And these are the men who teach our children the wonderful mysteries of life, of religion, of the Almighty Power behind all things, as they understand it.

ALFRED DE FRAINE.

Some of your correspondents seem to have confused ideas as to the definition or meaning of the word "Agnosticism," and use it loosely. May I refer such to the following passages, taken from Huxley's essay on "Agnosticism and Christianity," 1889? I believe there would not be quite such a display, nowadays, of readiness to include Agnostics and Atheists in the same category if



Huxley's remarks were borne in mind—and he, by the way, was the originator of the word: "Speaking for myself . . . I further say that Agnosticism is not properly described as a 'negative' creed, nor, indeed, as a creed of any kind, except in so far as it expresses absolute faith in the validity of a principle, which is as much ethical as intellectual. The principle may be stated in various ways, but they all amount to this: that it is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty. This is what Agnosticism asserts; and, in my opinion, it is all that is essential to Agnosticism."

Denmark Hill.

FRANK AUCUTT.

The middle-aged son of extremely devout believers, I have all my life thought much on the subject of the Christian religion. As a boy I asked my mother again and again for evidence and proof of her faith, but all that she, an affectionate and intellectual woman, could say was, "I know; I know; I feel it is true." The inherent improbability of the Fall, the inherent injustice of all being made liable to suffer for the sin of one, the astounding nature of the idea that the Maker of the millions and millions of stars should come on earth in human form and be born of woman instead of coming and going miraculously, the awful and harrowing dogma of Hell and predestination, the hideous amount of undeserved wrong which falls to the lot of the drunkard's wife, or the mother of a "black sheep," or the sufferer from inherited disease, all of which wrong has been foreseen by the Omniscient—these things cruelly oppressed my spirits. The answer I always made to myself was, "There must be a God, and these devout persons are so positive that

they know all about Him that they must be right." You see, I did not dare imagine I could know better than they. But as time elapsed I heard of the doctrine of evolution, and after years of study, especially of geology and of the gradual appearance and gradual disappearance in the course of many millions of years of different species of animals, I accepted evolution as a fact. Still there was the miraculous nature of the prophecies in the Old Testament. Never for a minute did it occur to me either that the interpretation was forced, or that they could have been written "after the event," as is now believed by many of the higher critics. And now I have learnt that other religions, like Buddhism, have almost as many beneficent precepts as Christianity, without such severity against non-believers. It has always appeared to me incredible that use of our reason, the highest development of life, should bring about eternal punishment. I am an honest Agnostic, and a happy one. I veritably believe that the lifting of the enormous load of fear and doubt as to a future life is an untold benefit once one is accustomed to the idea. My chief hope for the progress of our country is that the best moral code, as in Japan, may be taught in our schools, and take a prominent place in a form of Sunday improvement services, which shall be adapted to the needs of different neighbourhoods. In the poor and slum districts I would instruct, in addition, in hygiene, the care of the home, the evils and folly of vice, the virtues of thrift, self-respect, kindness, &c. In better-class neighbourhoods, in addition to moral instruction, I would seek the arousing of interest in various directions by lectures, discussions, concerts, exhibitions, all tending to increase our intelligence and efficiency, and to fill profitably what is a day of idleness to thousands who are not worn out by phy-

sical fatigue. By such means the progress and happiness of the nation would take a great step forwards.

Southsea.

A CONTENTED AGNOSTIC.

One of your correspondents has asserted that an Agnostic cannot face the shadow of death with the same complacency as a Christian, implying that the death-bed, or the illness which brings one almost to the verge of death, of an Agnostic is a terrible time of retrospection and recantation. I am an Agnostic, because my reason forbids me to accept the set of dogmas known as Christianity. A few years ago I lay on a bed of sickness for six months, and I approached death as near as it was possible to do without actually dying. I felt no fear, no remorse for my opinions. There was no lack of spiritual consolation, had I desired it; but my feeling then was what I believe is the feeling of all, Christian or Agnostic, after suffering months of acute pain, that death would be a happy release from those terrible sufferings. Thanks to the wonderful skill of doctors and surgeons, and to the splendid and devoted attention and nursing of my dear mother (now dead), I recovered, and, the fulness of health having returned, I have as much desire to live as my fellow-Christian has. This bogey of infidel death-beds has had a good run. The S.P.C.K has published a book on the subject, but they will not admit any denial of their "facts." These statements of death-beds of a century ago are difficult to disprove, but if any of your readers still believe these tales, let them read Carlyle on Voltaire and Conway on Tom Paine's death-bed scene.

Kennington, S.E.

GEO. THWAITES.

I understand the query of "Oxoniensis" to mean "Do we believe in the fundamental tenet of Christianity?" *i.e.*,

that the spiritual salvation of mankind, past, present, and to come, hangs solely on the vicarious death of Jesus, called the Christ? For my own part I do not believe in a personal God, who has been seen in Heaven with His Son beside Him. I agree with the divines who have lately questioned the incarnation, virgin birth, bodily resurrection, and ascension, as given in the Gospels. I do not think I ought to be called a Christian, lacking as I do the cardinal tenets, and my astonishment is great that orthodox Christianity, which I believe is fully apprehended by few, should be professed by so many, except they are influenced by secular motives. Yet I do believe. In every detail of existence I apprehend the existence of law, and a supreme force leading to harmony and uniformity amongst phenomena, which to limited human perception stand for little more than confusion and irregularity. I find myself personally involved in this cosmic order and harmony, so that I am constrained in my own interests to conform to the moral law, the details of which in the main command, and have always commanded (even long before the Christian era), the assent of intelligent humanity. My conduct should in no respect fall short of the highest ideals of Christianity, though practically I realise how very far I fall short of what is right. The formalities of religion, I am fully convinced, are merely pagan rites with a veneer of new theory wrapped round them.

VERITAS.

Many believe, but why? Why did I believe? I gave up position and money to preach the Gospel, and did so for seven years, because I believed in the literal inspiration of the Bible. How did I come to believe that? In the first place, because I was taught it; secondly, because I never questioned its truth; and, thirdly,



because I read and studied only literature that supported it. Now I do not believe in religion at all, and consider the Bible as being man's conception of God. What has brought this change? Firstly, the lack of the spirit of Christ in the clergy. That gave the first doubt. If they believed the Bible, how could they lead such lives? Secondly, the study of science and Herbert Spencer's works. I have given up my belief because I was forced to by reason and fact.

Leyton.

W. A. N.

The question does not admit of a general answer, unless it be this, that every thinking being must believe something. The Christian believer accepts controlled existence, and allots responsibility to his God; the unbeliever believes in freedom from control and personal responsibility. This matter of responsibility was the one on which my faith foundered. I had been taught to worship a God of love, all-powerful, watchful over and controlling every human act. But to grant this necessitated the simultaneous allocation to the Supreme Being of direct responsibility for all the evil as well as all the good in life. My scepticism was born of the inability to believe in an Almighty Being—whom the Christian Churches directly charge with responsibility—capable of permitting the evil daily to be met with in this world. I could only satisfy myself by adopting the theory that our life is what we make it. I claim no particular happiness from this mental attitude, except that it releases me from attempting to reconcile inconsistencies. Still, I would not disturb those who are firm in their faith, and who accept without hesitation the teaching that "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." This life to me is "a passing"



which it rests with me to shape. Lacking faith, I can no more satisfy thoughts on the prospects of a future existence than upon the equally puzzling problem of a prior existence. Faith will permit belief in an eternity with a beginning ; reason forbids it to me.

Noel Park, N.

A. K.

May I be allowed to attempt a reply to "Anxious" (whose letter seems very pitiful), as I have passed through a similar experience? He says he is longing to know and find God. So have all men with sensitive brains and nerves ever since time was. Those of us, however, who have reached the Agnostic position do not strain our eyes to find a hand coming out of the void, but we worship the vision of ideal good in our minds and endeavour, more or less successfully, to approximate thereto. Clerical persons have much to answer for in misleading the people to expect a miracle in an orderly Cosmos, and if "Anxious" will only try and do as much good as he can without looking for reward—in short, loses himself in unselfish, kindly thought and action for other people—he will forget his problems, and temptation will gradually become less insistent, and he will gain a foretaste of "the peace that passeth all understanding," which we can only hope to know fully when death takes us away. There is no reason why he should "drift to the bad."

E. T. C.

I venture to assert that if belief be taken to mean unconditional assent to the dogmas of some form or other of Christianity, the majority of educated persons do not believe, and the assent of the uneducated is imperfect, because it is a matter of routine, and seldom

definitely formulated. I do not believe. The "evidences" of Christianity do not warrant so tremendous a surrender of the judgment as real assent requires, and the blood-stained history of the Church of Christ does not convince me of the necessity of religion for even the most unenlightened. Sustained by their terribly egoistic induction of immortality, blinded by an ecstatic contemplation of supposed eternal happiness, Christians have seen with indifference their citadels fall one by one before the siege guns of the soldiers of free thought. What matters to them the fall of a religion whose teaching they have long ceased to practise while it still affords them an anodyne to thought? And what does it matter to the world, since the Churches have long ceased to be anything but the cold sepulchres of dusty dogmas? The virtues of Christianity and its morality have departed to the Agnostic. Steadily to seek truth, to refuse to accept what the mind cannot grasp, to try "to see life whole," and then to face the end intrepidly and reverently, confident in having done one's best as an organism of the mighty whole—surely, this is the true life of a man.

Manchester.

X.

I am a professional man who has, after a most careful study of numerous works bearing on the question under discussion, become an Agnostic. I have never sought to impose my views on any one, but as I attend no place of worship the usual conclusions are drawn. I am not ashamed of my belief, and I have suffered severely as the result of it. I meet petty persecution in all shapes and forms with the contempt it deserves, and I can assure your correspondent that were I to announce my conversion to Christianity to-morrow it would be worth £500 a

year to me in my profession. Only last week I was held up to reprobation to a new lady resident in the neighbourhood as I attended no place of worship. The lady replied that she would think no less of me for that, and she is an ardent Christian. There has been a great improvement of late years in religious tolerance, but the days of the Inquisition are not yet over in many a country village.

Bristol.

BRISTOLIENSIS.

A lady correspondent says that if for the term "Agnostic" the term "ignoramus" were substituted, the number of Agnostics would quickly diminish. The changed epithet which she suggests is perfectly fair, for "Agnostic" means "not knowing," whilst "ignoramus" means "we don't know." So she pertinently inquires how many persons would be content to call themselves ignoramuses in matters of religious belief. Let me first offer a counter query. How many would be content to call themselves Christians if the acceptance of the name made it imperative for them to live as Christ did? Not many, I think. Nor do I think that many Agnostics would withstand the obloquy involved in an opprobrious epithet. Amongst Agnostics, as amongst Christians, there are many insincere and many cowardly ones. In both camps they are unwelcome hinderers. The sincere and brave Christian believes in certain dogmas, and reverences an anthropomorphic God. The sincere and brave Agnostic finds all current religious dogmas to be equally foolish, offers no alternative dogma, humbly confesses his ignorance, and yet remains reverent in the presence of the great Infinity. I greatly esteem the sincere and practical believer in any religious creed. But in the reverent Agnostic I find the

highest type of courage and of unflinching determination to be satisfied with naught but the very truth.

Cardiff.

IGNORANT AGNOSTIC.

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings." The following incident has remained very fresh in my memory, and illustrates the positivism of intelligent children and their direct way of getting right at the back of things. Some eleven or twelve years ago two charming and intelligent girls—Creoles from one of our Colonies—spent their autumn holidays with my wife and myself. They were at a convent school near Paris, and were being very strictly brought up in the Romish faith. One day our servant reported to my wife that during a walk she had taken them through the village churchyard, when the younger girl (aged eight), looking sorrowfully at the evidences of past generations, exclaimed, "Ah! There they lie—and all in Hell." An evening or so afterwards I was taking them for a walk. It was a brilliant starlight night, near mid-September, and Arcturus at once took their attention. The elder girl (aged twelve) at once began to question me about it and the stars generally. I told what little I knew about our own small system, and that Arcturus, Sirius, and many others were suns—centres of systems of revolving planets—systems similar to our own, but many of them much larger, and probably far more important. The child seemed to gather some idea of the vastness of the universe, and asked, "And are they inhabited?" I replied probably they were, but we could not speak positively, nor could we have the faintest idea of the conditions of life on such worlds, &c. Up to this I had dealt fairly well with the flood of queries put to me, and I must confess to a certain amount of self-satisfaction that I had been able to reply to the many pertinent

questions of a more than average intelligent child. But what followed was a facer : "And do you think, Mr. — they have all had a Redeemer?" I left it, but I remembered my Tennyson, "Leave thou thy sister when she prays."

Bushey.

AGNOSTIC.

In common with many of your correspondents, I believe the time is at hand when intelligent people everywhere will admit that the dogmas of Christianity belong to a phase of thought and development for ever gone by. But I believe, too, that out of the ashes of this dead system will arise a nobler, because larger and truer, faith. And if the process of change is accompanied by some pain, and even spiritual loss, it can only be for a time, during which we shall not be without compensation. Religion and morals do not depend upon one's being able to subscribe to creeds ; and it must be an unutterable relief to many to be able, with a good conscience, to cease from the effort to digest that crude mass of incredibilities of which they are one and all made up. We may now read the Bible as we should any other book dealing with times and habits of mind widely remote from our own, and so reading it, we shall find the obstacles which the theologians have put in our way disappear. For some of us it had become, of all great books, the only unreadable one. At last it may begin to take its rightful place, not only as the most valuable, but as the most charming collection of writings in existence. Not a few of those who have written to you have blamed the clergy for the present unsettled state of opinion in matters theologic. Surely this is to show a complete want of comprehension of the strength of the current sweeping on in the direction of unbelief, as well as a failure to realise the difficult position in which the clergy are placed. No



one who has followed the growth of religious opinion in Germany, France, or England can be unaware of the fact that there has long been a vast and widespread movement away from the orthodox standpoint. And who can help feeling sympathy with the clergy who remembers how prodigiously they are loaded with bias, and how any really detached examination of the matter is well-nigh impossible for them? Inheritance, early training, present environment, fear of being misunderstood and of a weakened position in Church and Society, all combine to keep from them the light. But, if more slowly, they are clearly marching with the rest—marching towards that goal in which the things of the mind and the spirit will at last find their reconciliation.

Manchester.

RENASCENCE.

All your correspondents seem either to have forgotten, or not to be aware of, the fact that the Four Gospels are fragmentary reproductions of an older book, which for the sake of convenience we may call the *Protevangel*—a religious romance written in Alexandrian Greek, and probably at Alexandria, in the first or second century of our era, by some unknown author, well versed in the religions of Persia and Judea—a work very similar to the extant religious romance entitled “*Barlaam and Josaphat*,” but so far superior that it has exercised an immense and highly beneficial influence over the minds of men such as the latter never has done nor can do. As Jesus Bar-Joseph, otherwise The Christus, commonly called Jesus Christ, is a purely fictitious person, it is folly to argue about his historic actions; but his beautiful and sublime character will ever render him most deservedly an object of admiration and imitation and love.

HENRY HASTINGS.

The knell of Christianity as a revealed religion based on documents which are claimed as different in kind, and not merely in degree, from other sacred writings, is sounded wherever the late Professor Jowett's counsel "to interpret the Scriptures like any other book" is acted upon. How else can we deal with that "venerable record of ancient life, miscalled a book" (the words are Huxley's), with a collection of varied literature of, in some cases, unknown authorship and, as the many sects evidence, of unsettled meaning? The claims which are made for the Bible—claims which none of its writers, all honest men, make for their writings—are one by one refuted. The discoveries of astronomy, geology, and anthropology have made clear the errors which it contains, errors which were the inevitable product of the times and conditions under which they were recorded. And now we have the vast co-ordinating evidence of evolution—a doctrine accepted in its general principles by every intelligent divine—which, establishing the fundamental identity of the living and non-living contents of the universe, demonstrates the psychical as well as the physical oneness of man and all the lower animals. And what comparative anatomy and psychology have thus proven is supported by comparative theology and mythology as to the origin and growth of every religion. All are shown to be purely human products, strivings of the mind to explain its relation to the universe, all charged with the legendary and with assumptions about supernatural agencies the advance of disbelief in which is the measure of our advance in knowledge of "the eternal order which never dies," belief in which is man's one sure foundation. Therefore the question, "Do we believe?" must be met by another question, "What is there left to believe?" since the articles of the several creeds have vanished

under the solvent of historical scrutiny. Explanation and definition have proved their doom. There remains what nothing can destroy, and what the story of the progress of humanity justifies, the nutrition of the emotions, primal in the race, by emulation of its greatest and best, the Christs and Buddhas, who command the reverence of hundreds of millions of mankind. But what about sin and repentance and forgiveness and all the rest? Well, the solution will be found in the transfer of ethical creeds from a theological to a social base, so that all conduct is resolved into the duty which each man owes to his fellow, and all to the Society of which they are units. Consequences can be left to take care of themselves, since man will then be "a part of the eternal order, and the eternal order never dies."

EDWARD CLODD.

Strafford House, Aldeburgh, Suffolk.



### SECTION III

*DOUBT*





## SECTION III

### *DOUBT*

WILL you take a brief letter from an ordinary business man, as a contrast to the learned dissertations which have taken up so much valuable space? Nearly all England believes in a future state, in the life, death, and resurrection of the Christ, in the eventual triumph of good over evil, in most of the Bible, but not in Hell. Here is, however, the crucial point—it does not result, except in about 5 per cent. of the population, in the self-sacrificing life of the Bible model. The reason is simple. The exigencies of life of the great majority of mankind prevent it. The man finds himself in a business world existing by the process of getting the better of your neighbour by any means not criminal in the eyes of the English law. Christian precepts have no weight. What of Christian precepts when soldier meets soldier on the field of battle? Self-preservation compels him to try and kill his enemy. Self-preservation is the motive of the battle of life. We neither admire the one nor the other, but we cannot get out of it. The man lives and acts in a world which gets its living by lying and deceit. I call a spade a spade. The problem is simple in the extreme, as there are only two alternatives.

1. Fight on Christian principles, and you cannot earn

money ; if you do not earn money you starve. The Christian landlord will not hesitate to put the brokers in.

2. Fight the world with its own weapons, as mentioned before, and if you are sharp enough you will become a respected member of society and be able to subscribe to charities, &c., and help others as you feel you want to.

The former represents 5 per cent. of the population ; the latter 95 per cent. of the population. Experience of life tells us, if we are honest in stating it, that the goodness of a man, personified by his kindness, long-suffering, honesty, purity, and the character making for a good husband, father, and citizen, is absolutely independent of what he believes. Statistics show that not more than 20 per cent. of the population worship together in church, chapel, &c. Out of these what proportion, ministers of religion, can you say are leading real Christian lives as in contrast to the ordinary Englishman ? Can you say a quarter ? I doubt it. If we were all honest with ourselves there could be but little belief in Hell. The clergy of almost all denominations try to explain it away ; they talk of mental suffering, &c., as if everlasting consciousness of mental suffering or remorse can be anything less horrible and revengeful than the orthodox Hell. If I wake to a life hereafter, all the need of using sinful ways, which I now hate, are gone ; my fellow-creatures have also lost all desire for sin. It is our bodily wants that produce sin ; my spiritual aspirations were always after a better life ; now I can live it, because I am in an atmosphere of goodness. It is my ideal, at last secured, "all light and love." This is the triumph of goodness.

Birmingham.

UNORTHODOX.

The idea contained in one passage of the letter by "Oxoniensis" has been the strongest reason for the loss

of faith in my own case, and I suppose in the case of many more—faith in the earnestness and sincerity of the many and various congregations of church and chapel goes up and down the country, who, if “actions speak louder than words,” belie all their professions of meekness, charitableness, love for others, and their duties to God. This is the passage : “Do we act as if we believed that this world was a preparation for the next ?” Some time ago in Hyde Park I heard a similar question put by an Agnostic lecturer in these words, “Do professedly religious people, old or young, rich or poor, act as though they believed that God was ever by their side ?” This set up a train of thought in my mind which has resulted in a complete revolution of my ideas and conceptions concerning the different forms of belief and the various shades of believers. One may try in vain to observe any difference in the conduct of church-going people in any branch of commercial activity or business life, either as principals, agents, dealers, buyers, or sellers. In the professions—legal, medical, military, or literary—the same motives seem to influence all. In their public or private lives no difference is appreciably noticeable in their various relationships with those above or below them. Belief or unbelief in a future state seems to make not the slightest difference in their conduct, expressed hopes, or ambitions. In times of trouble, misfortune, or illness everybody acts in a very similar way. Their spiritual faith is at a very low ebb, lower in proportion to the financial or moral strength at their disposal. The value of all their previous professions is seen, or rather is not seen, exactly at the point and at the time when most expected. The cause of this inconsistency is not far to seek. Human experience negatives the idea of gaining material benefits through spiritual channels. Man alone can assist man or

not at all ; all else is delusion magnified into faith or belief. For all practical purposes belief in the efficacy of prayer, in the utility of appealing to the Almighty, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, All-Wise, and all-loving Creator, has gone, and must inevitably go from the minds of the millions of sufferers in hospitals, institutions, asylums, and homes, with their families, relations, and friends. Calamities by land and sea, plagues and famines, wars and pestilences, catastrophes and accidents of all kinds—all preventible, could we but believe. But is it believable? Do we believe?

19, Oxford Road, Kilburn.

HENRY B. SAMUELS.

That there has been a veritable wave of unbelief spreading over the world, especially disbelief in dogmatic Christianity, one must be wilfully blind not to see. The signs of it are everywhere—in magazine literature, as well as in many notable books, some of which may be some day considered as classics, like Renan's "Life of Jesus." On the other hand, has crime increased, and the active virtues, like charity and a general attempt to improve the conditions of man, decreased? I have no statistics at hand to refer to, but I should say, from my reading of history and personal observation over some fifty odd years, that just the reverse is the case. The population of the world has enormously increased, which brings in a new factor to make comparison more difficult, but the evidence seems pretty clear that the world is getting better, on the whole, as dogmatic belief declines, and it is an open question whether this is merely a coincidence or whether it is a case of cause and effect. Compare the situation to-day, for instance, with what we read of the condition of things in the Middle Ages, when the religious question seems to have been the paramount one and peoples went to war



over a tenet ! In fact, is it at all clear that some of the dogmas of Christianity, both "Orthodox" and "Protestant," are not subverting to moral progress ?

Bellagio.

SEARCHER AFTER TRUTH.

Is not this question summed up in the words of the late Charles Dickens when he wrote : "The tradings in and professions of religion are driving the spirit out of many a thousand" ? When we study the precepts and observe the practice, is there a cause for wonder ? Bishops living in palaces and dying in affluence without so much as a widow's mite for the poor and needy, either cleric or lay. The enormous amount of wealth and time which is wasted in promulgating doctrine, enforcing dogma, and enriching ritual, and the little attention and less money in raising the moral and material welfare of the people. Christianity, like Socialism, is a magnificent ideal. The Cross and Man of Sorrows must ever remain as a beacon light and as a stepping-stone to a higher life, but where there is no prospect of having a communion of interests I fear it will be impossible to have a communion of saints.

FRANK G. GLADDING.

4, Norbury Court Road, Norbury, S.W.

I am a clergyman's son, brought up in the atmosphere of fervent prayers and hymns, nourished on spirituality. My father, a most excellent man, and really enlightened in "Gospel liberty," fully believed what he taught, or, at least, believed that he believed it all. A naturally refined and conscientious man, he would have acted justly in any profession. All the teachings of the Christian Church were forced upon my young and tender mind. I listened to sermons an hour long ; the Sunday was spent in Sunday School or church, and no books but Sunday ones allowed.

When I went to London at the age of sixteen into an office, I found I had no strength to withstand the temptations of "the world, the flesh, and the devil." I had been reared in a hothouse, and withered with the first breath of real air. My opinion now is that to profess Christian religion a mind must be very strong (and I think people are very wrong to work upon the unformed minds of children and to teach them things which are not positive as if they were immortal truths). It needs a well-balanced mind to choose the good and refuse the evil of vital importance. Men will not be frightened by the bogeys of the unknown future in these days; they humbly desire to "prove all things." Men must think they are no longer children, but they should think reverently. Thinking, humble men will hesitate to say "I believe" if they do not really and truly do so; and who dare condemn honest doubt? If we live again and stand before a Judge, then, and not till then, if then even, shall we know all the truth. Truth surely must, even with our supposed future capabilities, be greater than we shall be.

Hillingdon, Middlesex.

C. J. MAURICE.

The discussion is evidently going to have far-reaching effects. May I add my difficulties to the list of problems to be solved? I was brought up to believe, and was very much shocked when my beliefs were called in question. But the Church has made me ask what it is I do believe. Last year the Bishop of Wakefield, speaking at Leeds, said: "The Bible is not infallible," "The Bible is not necessarily literal and exact," "It is not a scientific textbook," "The old chronology was not inspired," "The dates in the ordinary Bible are no guides to the dates of the books," and "The world was not created 4,004 years before Christ." This year Canon Cheyne, speaking at the

Churchmen's Union at Westminster, said that "It could be easily shown that some of the narratives in the Old Testament were coloured by Oriental mythology. The earlier chapters of Genesis containing the cosmogony and the Deluge, and such stories as Jonah in the big fish, were semi-mythical and Oriental in origin, showing the influence of Babylonia." Those statements are calculated to shake the alleged belief of men like myself, who have but limited time for Bible study. But the worthy and scholarly canon goes still further, for he said things about the Virgin birth which appalled me—but allow me to quote from a daily paper: "I have no intention of giving any shock," said Canon Cheyne, "in touching upon the Virgin birth of the Redeemer. But he claimed that the new facts brought to light showed that the Jewish narrator had derived it from a non-Jewish source, and that was the mythology of Babylonia and Egypt. The use of the word 'virgin' arose out of a misunderstanding of the meaning of the original word, which referred to the Divine generation of certain favoured persons. As a historian, he could not refuse to recognise the possibility of this origin of the story." Most of your correspondents appear to me to be blaming the scientific people for shaking our faith; but when the Bishop of Wakefield and Canon Cheyne are still members of the Church, what are we poor laymen to believe?

Oxford.

A WANDERER.

Formerly I believed, as I was taught to believe implicitly, everything that was contained in the Holy Scriptures as not only being substantially, but literally correct. I do not say that I have wholly cast this simple faith aside, but as I am no expert, and have no special knowledge or capacity for arriving at the truth, I must confess myself

perplexed, and more or less at the mercy of the so-called higher critics of Scripture. I do not so much refer to the avowed infidelity of the English deist Paine, or the French philosopher and poet Voltaire, or even to the scientific pronouncements of Darwin, Huxley, and others, so much as to the disbeliefs of Christian scholars and divines, regius professors of divinity, and bishops and deans of the Church. If I am to believe what they say, nearly everything that I once held has to be given up. I believe that many of the truths which we Christians believe are common truths, and underlie all the great religions, and that Christianity as the latest is the highest and the best development or evolution of all that has gone before.

Barton.

PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN DESPAIR.

What is the meaning implied in these three words—"Do we believe?" Are we to take it, Do we believe in a Christ, and, moreover, so shape our lives as He would have wished us—in other words, are we living according to that sensational book, "In His Steps," or are we to understand it, Do we believe there is a God—a Supreme Being, who guides our doings and shapes them as He will? All will, they cannot do otherwise, believe there was a Christ, who lived a life that was perfect both in love and humility. But when it comes to us following His life and example in all its intricate details, all will, I think, agree that such is impossible. Time changes all things, and the age of to-day is very different from that in which Christ lived. We are charged with lack of faith. But one of your correspondents tells us that faith is a Divine gift, not given to all. Hence the difficulty of many of us. I am not a scoffer; far from it. It is my earnest desire to obtain information on this most difficult point, which ought to be, I firmly

believe, the earnest desire of every member of this glorious, highly-civilised State of ours. What I judge the real problem to be is this: Are we to cast aside our individualism in the hope of obtaining this gift of faith; are we to rely alone on that same individualism; or are we to attempt to combine the two things? The Roman is, I believe, compelled to sink his individualism, while the Established Church man is allowed to retain it. If there is a God, will it not avail me to rely on individualism altogether, since I have some conception that He will assist me? Or, if there is no God, will not that so-called conscience guide me safely? Personally, I am tempted to believe that it is all a matter of conscience.

Stratford, E.

THOMAS HOLT-HUGHES.

As one who has lost regretfully his faith along with his childhood, permit me to add that just as there are compensations in growing out of one's childhood, so there are equally compensations in losing one's faith. For instance, we no longer believe in the doctrine, preached commonly enough fifty years ago, of eternal punishment and hell-fire, nor do we believe so much in God's wrath and anger as in His love and sympathy. This is surely something gained. Neither do we believe, as we were taught once to believe, that the many shall be lost and the few saved. Popular theology refuses to accept this, even though Christ Himself said it. No; we are not going to have any such disquieting kind of theology as that. Our present faith—when we have any, must be, before all things, a comfortable one, and our parsons must "prophecy unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits," even the deceit of ignoring future punishment, and persuading us that we are all going to Heaven when we die! Truly do some of our modern Christians, both



cleric and lay, remind one of what Gladstone said of Matthew Arnold, that "with a sincere devotion to the Christian religion, he combined a faculty for presenting it in such a form as to be recognisable neither by friend nor foe." It is, I think, an indisputable fact that we have during the last fifty years entirely shifted our position with regard to Christianity, and now only accept such portions of the Gospel as are palatable to us, and practically ignore or explain away the rest. To the question, then, "Do we believe?" the answer is, Certainly not orthodox religion as taught in church and chapel, nor as we read it in the Gospels. Women worshippers who attend services believe, certainly, though their number is decreasing, but the immense majority of men do not. Still, though Englishmen have lost faith either in the absolute truth of the Gospel, or in the orthodox creed of the Churches, a very large and increasing number of them cling tenaciously to the following creed, namely—that there is a God and a future life, and that this world has in the life of Christ the nearest approach to a Divine human example to follow ever sent down amongst sinful men. Whether Christ was able to work miracles or not does not concern them, though they are inclined to doubt it. What does concern them is their belief that a great, inscrutable, living force and intelligence is slowly evolving order out of chaos, and bringing about that state of human perfection which we call "Heaven."

Halifax.

NEO-CHRISTIAN.

For the last five years I have been continually crying to God to relieve me from the greatest spiritual and mental distress. Scores of times I have forced myself to church, trusting that I might be allowed to take part in the service and to obtain some comfort from it, but have never suc-

ceeded. I can conscientiously say that all this time I have been holding out my hands as it were for God's help, looking for some ray of light in my darkness. I have done my part to the best of my ability. I am only too anxious to find a loving, pitying God, and I sorrowfully say that so far my search has been in vain. There may be, for all I know, hundreds in the same condition. It is of no use telling us that we must have faith, must commit ourselves to Him, and so on. I am only too anxious to find peace and faith if I only knew how to do it. After years of agony one can only sign oneself

DESPAIR.

During the last twenty-five years a scientific reformation has taken place. The educated class has now a clearer knowledge of the physical and natural sciences. With this knowledge men cannot help "taking stock" of their beliefs and trying them. It takes a long time to get accustomed to the idea that, after all, Christianity may be classed with Mohammedanism and Buddhism. It may take twenty-five, perhaps fifty, or even one hundred years for education to have become so universal that the mists of faith in Divine intervention shall have melted before its rays—but come it undoubtedly will. I have no hesitation in stating that among the highly educated a rapidly increasing number of Agnostics exists. I know that in the University to which I belong many of those who attend chapel do not believe. They are forced to do so by public opinion, which regards it as a sin to seek after truth. A close friend of mine, who is a lecturer in another University, tells me that very little genuine belief exists among his colleagues. Personally I am supposed to be a Christian. My "bread and butter" would go short if I proclaimed my inward thoughts.

A BROTHER OF A CLERGYMAN,

Do the clergy believe what they preach and have sworn to defend? Strange question. If Christianity rests solely on its miracles, &c., and we have to accept impartial historical criticism of this religion, I am afraid a good many folk are resting on blind faith. Will some one inform me why Canon Cheyne is allowed to issue the "Encyclopædia Biblica," showing there are only really nine genuine passages in the canonical Gospels? I understand this is the latest Bible dictionary, and the results have been accepted by the leading divines of the day.

Liverpool.

H. A. ISMAY.

Thirty-five years ago I was rector of a large agricultural parish in the East of England. I was very happy there until doubts began to arise in my mind as to the literal interpretation of the Bible. The more I studied the subject the more the doubt increased; and, as I did not like to shake the faith of the rather sleepy population of the village, I determined to resign my living, retire for a time from the active ministry of the Church, and devote myself to the study of those questions which, even at that date, were beginning to perplex men's minds. I carried out my plan. I gave up my living, and left the county in which I had lived for many years, so that I might feel myself free to think without disturbing the faith of my old parishioners. Well, the end of it all was that I ceased to believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible. It then appealed to me as a collection of books, most useful to study. Its pages reflected the history of the Jewish people mainly—some of the stories false, some true, depending on the various writers—written exactly as one might have naturally expected the early writers of history to express themselves. In fact, the Bible, divested of the Divine glamour which formerly surrounded it,

is a far more valuable book to me than it formerly was. I am no longer surprised to find errors in science, or in the explanation of the origin of languages, or in accounts of cruelty in warfare. The sun may stand still, Balaam's ass may speak, the Witch of Endor may raise Samuel from the dead, the Tower of Babel may rise to heaven, without causing me any anxiety. The early histories of other nations are full of such stories. One must take the good and the bad and sift for oneself. I am convinced that the Bible will be a far more useful book when it is entirely divested of the halo of sanctity which surrounds it.

EXAMINER.

In considering evidence, ecclesiastical, civil, or criminal, there are a few notions that usually guide the members of my branch of the profession, whose duty it is to get up the brief for counsel—in other words, to ascertain the facts of the case. One idea is that you cannot by evidence prove an impossibility—for instance, that Venus was born in the manner alleged. Another is that documents in the wrong language (the writers of the Gospels are supposed to have been Hebrews) are not admissible as evidence. A third is that “custody” is of importance. Where did these very similar Greek documents come from? And a fourth is that witnesses to events who state, in effect, that they were not there (see opening of St. Luke) are not witnesses at all. The Old Testament is a most delightful document, but it is a collection of law, history, fable, drama, poetry, and tradition. The New Testament proves nothing more than an attempted reformation and a sad martyrdom, which the paganism of the Roman Empire turned into a human sacrifice to appease an offended Deity. It is, I submit, abundantly clear that there is no conflict between science and the religious sentiment, and no necessity to



displace any of our clergy, as the ideals of the Founder of Christianity are far from realisation.

A RETIRED ATTORNEY.

I am afraid that mine is another of those cases which have been so pathetically deplored by some of your Christian correspondents. Do I believe? Yes. I believe that a wider knowledge and acceptance of evolution, combined with the greater desire of men to labour in the service of man, will be the distinguishing characteristics of the twentieth century. The reluctance of the clergy to embrace the theory of evolution, and to recognise the facts that Nature is uniform in action and that the law of causation is universal, are two of the chief causes which have contributed to the possibility of this correspondence. I have no quarrel with a rational Christianity; but when I am asked to accept a belief in which miracles and supernaturalism are among its chief characteristics, and to confine my faith to the literal translation of a book which I believe to be a hindrance to human progress, then I can no longer attend any church where theology of this description is tolerated. Mine has been a hard and chequered career, but through it all I believe I have led a fairly upright and honest life, and if I continue to do so, I shall not expect any particular reward after death; neither do I fear any punishment. If it can be said of me that "he understood humanity and worked in the service of man," it is all I desire.

Plymouth.

W. H. WISE.

Apparently believing comes only after a practical experience of communion of spirit with God. If we have never experienced personally that communion, we are not to be blamed for doubting its reality in others when their lives



do not appear to have been affected by it so as to make them superior to others who openly acknowledge no such communion.

HERETIC.

There have been touching letters on Christian peace at dissolution, which, from long experience, I can fully confirm ; but, in all equity, I must add that I have generally seen the same calm and beautiful endings with Jews, Turks, Chinese, Japanese, Hindoos, Persians, and other non-Christian fellow-creatures. And I think this may be confirmed by other correspondents, if brought to notice. Calm resignation characterises most death-beds the whole world over.

M. D.

I do not know whether there is a Supreme Being or not ; but one who protects mankind from misfortune I cannot believe in, especially when I read of little children being burnt to death or tortured. It seems that the weak have to suffer unless they can find human champions to come to their aid. It required a great deal of agitation and legislation to put an end to the cruelties which were dealt with by the Factory Acts. In America to end the infernal system of black slavery it required a sanguinary war of four years' duration, with its huge loss of life and countless sufferings. With regard to a future life, I see no evidence in favour of it. When death parts me from my friends or relations I do not expect to see them again. This does not give me any trouble, and it ought not to trouble anybody who recognises that to live a busy life and make the world better should be the aim of every one. Nobody would then have time to brood uselessly over the inevitable.

Liverpool,

J. CAMPBELL.

I am a schoolmaster in a large London school. Every morning for half an hour I have to instruct my children in what is vaguely known as "religious instruction." This consists, in my case, of the life of Moses and the life of Christ. My children average the age of eight. Now, my beliefs have caused me some little worry as to what I should teach them. I don't know what I believe. I have studied for two years at a British University and have read widely on subjects touching religious belief. As a result of my reading I do not believe in many stories of the Bible. Christ is to me a man, pure, simple, yet a good one. Now, I teach my class every morning that certain events happened long ago, and the inevitable question comes, "Is it true, sir?" What do I say? Why, "Yes." Now am I what I sign myself,

A HYPOCRITE?

I thoroughly believe that we are still an intensely religious people, but have lost faith in our leaders. And what wonder? The English Church to-day stands halting between Rome and Rationalism, in spite of her higher critics and Protestants of the Kensit stamp. Nonconformity appeals chiefly through the engaging personality of her prominent preachers, who, whatever their merits, can scarcely pose as champions of orthodoxy. Outside the Church and outside Dissent stands the individual thinker, whose name, doubtless, is legion, striving after knowledge rather than belief, while endeavouring, consciously or unconsciously, to follow, however haltingly, in the footsteps of the Son of Man. For those who hold that there is no religion higher than truth, the question of "belief" becomes one of comparatively small importance. For is it not, in nine cases out of ten, equivalent to nothing more than an intellectual assent to certain propositions

with regard to the relations of Man to his Maker, accepted on unexamined authority and often at the expense of honesty and common sense? Do we believe? No. Do we hunger and thirst after righteousness? Yes, a thousand times, yes. Let us seek for truth. Though maybe in this life we follow it but afar, the mere quest of it will doubtless bring us nearer to the throne of God than filling ourselves with the husks of worn-out creeds and dogmas.

HART DUMARTIN.

Among those who have spent their lives in the barren wilderness searching for truth one finds the ultimate conviction that, on our present intellectual basis, mystery increases with discovery. Haeckel—that “arch materialist”—in his great work, “The Riddle of the Universe,” under which he draws the line of his life’s labour, comes to the conclusion that the “law of substance,” the inner workings of Nature, are to-day as inscrutable as in the time of the ancient philosophers, and may even be said to increase in mystery with the advance of knowledge. Herbert Spencer, in the concluding chapter of his autobiography, makes the same admission. We may allow the scientific enthusiast any amount of latitude; we may speak of intercommunication between planets, the possibility of human life being evolved in the chemist’s laboratory, or new sense channels opened up; but still the mysteries and inexorable laws of Nature will confront us. Finality on scientific lines is unthinkable! Here, then, the believer, if he wishes, may take his stand without fear of encroachment. With a finite mind and the great difficulty in avoiding anthropomorphism, his conceptions of a Deity who cannot be judged on human lines or discussed in the symbols of our everyday language may lead him into pitfalls; but if he can but realise that these are

merely the outcome of the poverty of human intellectual capacity, and see that in the broadest sense "all things work together for good," he may not be put to confusion. Religion, in some shape or form, will continue to be a powerful factor in the lives of men, as filling a void that Science can never hope to fill. Let those to whom it may not appeal deal as tenderly as possible with the honest beliefs of others, and remember the words in Job: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou search out the Almighty to perfection?"

SENEC.

Many of your correspondents—nearly all of those, in fact, who go beyond a mere declaration of faith—appear very ready to give up the doctrinal and hold to the ethical side of the Christian religion. Perhaps it is due to the "hardness" of the process involved in coming to this very reasonable conclusion that these people have not realised exactly what they have left when they have so lightly thrown away the dogmatism. The Godhead and Incarnation of Christ and the Resurrection—these must be abandoned if we are to abandon dogma—the very conception of Redemption, which is a fundamental doctrine of Christianity in the ordinary sense of the word, must be given up. There is left, an ideal—the ideal of goodness in man—a code of morals. Is it enough, then, that we set this ideal before us—that we love Jesus of Nazareth, not as God Incarnate, not as Saviour and Redeemer, but just as the vision of what a man ought to be; that we try, clumsily enough, but still honestly, to shape our lives in accordance with His perfect life? Is this all we must do if we are to be called Christians? Surely such an application of the term "Christian" is a mere abuse of language. If not, every decent member of society is a



Christian, and the question, "Do we believe?" becomes "Do we acknowledge the moral law?" For the ideal character of Jesus, as set forth in the Gospels, is a moral ideal; and if "belief" in this be the test, then Huxley, Kant, and many others, charitably classed by the orthodox as "infidels," were as thoroughgoing Christians as any simple-minded parson who believed in the inspiration of the Bible and looked upon Darwin as an emissary of the Devil. Let us be honest with ourselves, when we have rejected the Christian dogmas, and say outright that we do not believe. There is nothing to be ashamed of in this; it does not mean that we have thrown away faith along with dogmatism. Faith in the goodness of the world is one thing; belief in a doctrine of redemption another. There is infinite mischief in the widespread conception that morality requires some omnipotent sanction of reward and punishment to make it binding on men, a conception which at once debases the whole idea of morality, and (quite rightly) gives rise to ugly thoughts as to the morality of the punisher. Another misconception, relating to the scope of our question, has evidently not quite died out. Some of your correspondents seem to imagine that they are justified in rejecting the Christian religion only to fall back on some other dogmatical creed. I read in one of the letters addressed to you a few days ago a statement of faith, elaborately drawn up on the lines of the Athanasian Creed, laying down that "matter is eternal and force is eternal. There is no force without matter," &c. It would be interesting to know the grounds on which these oracular statements are based. Still more so to know whether their author has ever read Berkeley, not to mention any of the more advanced metaphysicians. Another correspondent proclaims himself an adherent of a singularly uninviting school of dogmatism by signing him-



self "Atheist." I forget who it was who defined dogmatism as "puppyism grown up."

Oxford.

KAPANEUS.

Is it not manifest to every thinking man and woman that the correspondence marks a phase in the evolution of belief? Man believed thousands of years ago; man believes to-day. Why? Because there were things then that man did not know, and there are things to-day that man does not know. Paradoxical as it may appear, man was, and still is, agnostic: therefore he believes. The mind of man abhors a vacuum. In the absence of knowledge imagination fills the vacancy. From the earliest times to the present day belief has changed, and will go on changing. Man's increasing intelligence demands the constant dropping of inconceivable beliefs and the substitution of what is conceivable. In the opinion of men who lived not very long ago he who did not believe that the world was made in six days was an infidel; he who did not believe that the sun moved round the earth was an infidel; he who did not believe that a man lived three days in the belly of a fish was an infidel. To go further back, he who did not believe that the moaning of the wind in the trees was the voice of the god of the wind was an infidel. Surrounded as we are with what appears to us miraculous, we are asked to believe that anything is possible; but the stage of mental evolution now reached by civilised man demands something more than possibility. The tales of the six days' creation and Jonah and the whale are still fitted to the mental calibre of nations just emerging from barbarism, but are not satisfying to the progressive infidel who reads in God's book of Nature. Why all this conservatism on the part of the clergy for past beliefs? Should we respect the clergy

more or less if they heartily joined in helping on the evolution of belief, instead of vainly striving to act the part of a brake on the wheel of progress? Can they not help man to form a better conception of the great unknown? Is their imagination of a revengeful God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children even unto the third and fourth generation an unalterable belief? And must they go on for ever consigning to perdition Agnostics and infidels who are groping for a belief, but who simply cannot believe anything so horrible? Let them answer. Was the thing that Moses said a truth or a belief?

London.           AN EARNEST AND HONEST DOUBTER.

I shall be very grateful if some one of your correspondents will help me. I am longing to know and find God. I feel as if I am in a dark, dark room, groping for some one I am told is there, and I grope on and on, and always grasp thin air. How can I find Him, and be quite, quite sure that I have found Him? I hear of people who say they receive great comfort from the Holy Communion, so I stay this service, but I am confident I receive no benefit. I pray (because I read that if we do His will we shall know it) against fierce temptation, but the temptation remains, so what can I conclude but either there is no God, or, if there be, He will have nothing to do with me? "Etonensis" seems to have first believed because he found his prayers were answered. Mine are not, so that road is cut off. I feel if I do not soon find help I shall give up, and, as it appears a fact that we never stand still, I suppose I must drift to the bad.                           ANXIOUS.

I have listened to the preaching of hundreds of sermons. Some order a certain plan of treatment for a soul which they assert to be grievously affected and give no reason

for what they say or do. Others give their motives for everything which they affirm and explain what they prescribe for cure. Under the ministry of one of the last I sat for many years. He was conspicuous for sound judgment and for a peculiarly clear oratory. But I soon became conscious that he never once carried his reasoning to its logical conclusion. Still further, it was manifest that certain things were by him taken for granted, and it was held to be culpable to inquire into the reality of those assumptions. In fine, it was evident that there was a Bluebeard's closet in the house of God into which, in the preacher's opinion, it was death to pry. With the idea, which was gradually forced upon my mind, that there was a systematic suppression of the truth in the pulpit, I very carefully searched the Bible, upon which it is asserted all our faith is founded. I also made an examination of all religions and their influence upon mankind. I found that in every nation there have been, and still are, good men and bad men, gentle and brutal, thoughtful and ignorant, that the best men of paganism did not lose by comparison with the brightest light of Christianity, and that such large cities as London and Paris have as much vice within them as ancient Rome or modern Calcutta. I found, moreover, that the sharply-defined line commonly drawn between paganism and Christianity is worthless, the doctrine of the latter being in many respects identical with or deduced from the former. Let me contrast my own views with those generally current amongst us. I believe that God did not make men, any more than the beasts, to damn the largest number of them throughout eternity. I believe that all who aver that they have been selected by the Creator from all the world besides as the only recipients of salvation are wrong and deceivers of the people. There is not only a wide, but a constantly extending

dissatisfaction with the current theology taught by the ministers of all denominations.

La Turbie, France.

GEORGE HILL.

I wish to speak with all due reverence of *bonâ-fide* Christianity, but, verily, if a fervent belief in Christ is often apt to cause His British followers to make such fools of themselves as many seem to be doing in various parts of this island just at present, thinking people may well question whether there is not already a sufficiency of belief, in this country at least. The intelligent foreigner who reads this week about the vagaries of Wee Kirkers and Free Kirkers, or the antics which take place at the Dalkeith Evangelical Church, may possibly form some idea of Scottish humour, or the lack of it, and if he also devotes some attention to the outbursts of Mr. Evan Roberts and the Welsh revivalists, he may find cause to congratulate himself upon the fact of belonging to some benighted foreign country in which religion, like education, is none the less thorough because it is not talked about, written about, and generally thrust down our throats *ad nauseam*, as it certainly is in "Merrie England."

LOUIS HERVEY D'EGVILLE.

19, Baker Street, W.

I have been a careful reader of the correspondence under the above heading, and have so far waited in vain for some reference to what I consider to be the fundamental question underlying this controversy, namely, do we believe that the human race was cursed by the Creator as punishment for the disobedience of our original parents? In other words, do we believe in original sin? Unless this is realised and believed the necessity for a redemption cannot be understood. Evasion is useless. We must



either believe that we are eternally condemned by God or no. If the former, the propitiatory sacrifice of the Son of God for the salvation of mankind presents no difficulty in belief, and that miracles should have attended His coming, life, and death seems not strange, but natural and proper. But if we do not believe that we are lying under the condemnation of God as a consequence of the Fall of man, or, to put it briefly, if we do not believe in a fall, then we see no necessity for a redemption, and are consequently at liberty to regard the Scriptures merely as consisting, more or less, of historico-fabulous writings and Christianity as "morality tinged with emotion."

Dorking.

WALTER MOORE.

It is almost impossible for a thoughtful and earnest mind to accept the teaching of the modern Christian Church. In the first place, the Bible itself, though admittedly full of noble passages of poetic beauty and deep spiritual insight, yet abounds in contradictions and disharmonies, both confusing and misleading. Again, the Christian religion, like all old religions, has lost the purity, simplicity, and all-powerful spirituality of its earliest founders and has become encrusted with dead form and meaningless ceremonials. At the same time, the searching glance of modern science has shattered many of the foundations of ancient faith, throwing new light on man's relation to the universe. Also the modern struggle for existence is entirely out of harmony with the idealism of Jesus of Nazareth. The conduct of our clergy implies recognition of this, for, although they draw comfortable incomes for professing to teach Christian doctrine, they complacently ignore the first principle of the teaching of Jesus. Yet we hear they wonder why young men do not attend church and why the word "parson" makes intelli-



gent men smile contemptuously. The reason is not far to seek. Our clergy are, for the most part, narrow-minded slaves to half-dead ecclesiasticism, the unsympathetic exponents of a religion that is impracticable and altogether unsuitable to the requirements of modern life.

Alvechurch, Worcestershire.

JAMES PANE.

Will not some believer meet the difficulty originally raised by "Oxoniensis" and endeavour to reconcile Christian doctrine with Christian practice? It is hardly a complete answer to say that human nature is imperfect. Most Englishmen have sufficient strength of mind to realise their ideals. Probably not one in ten thousand has ever committed a dishonourable action. Towards the very few who may have been tempted beyond their strength Society is ruthless and their doom is irrevocable. 'Twere no charity to give instances. No danger could ever make an English sailor swerve from duty, nor the wealth of all the Indies tempt an English magistrate. Now, courage and integrity are sterling virtues, but they are by no means the special property of Christianity. Brave men lived before Agamemnon, Regulus could keep the spoken word, Lucrece might have set an example to some of the ladies at the Court of his most Christian Majesty Louis XV. Many letters have claimed our charity to the poor as a fruit of our faith. The poor are treated with more sympathy in the streets of Benares than in a London casual ward. No Lazarus now would be permitted to affront Dives with his miseries by sitting on his steps in Park Lane. Many have been the letters testifying to the sincerity of our national belief, but the question, "How does our profession affect our conduct?" still waits an answer.

W. J. C.

I was educated for the clerical profession, and practised it for several years. Having a taste for geology, I tried hard to reconcile it with the Biblical account of the Creation; but was driven to conclude that no reconciliation was possible. The Bible being proved mistaken in one thing, its authority was shattered. The study of anthropology, philology, and biology followed geology, with the same result. The moral character of many parts of the Bible vanished when the Book was read in a natural way. Thus I came, very reluctantly and after long struggle, to see that no Divine revelation had been granted to man. But I find that the theological loss is moral gain. Our efforts for human renovation can now proceed on the lines of Nature and common sense. Time and labour, once devoted to the preparation of ourselves and others for a life beyond the grave, can be concentrated upon objects of practical beneficence, of whose reality and utility there is no difference of opinion. If all the clergy and Churches were to abandon their creeds and rituals, and to become exclusively philanthropists, what a gain it would be to human progress!

Cheltenham.

C. CALLAWAY.

Do we know we believe, or merely think we do? A story told of a lady who was journeying to Australia will illustrate what I mean. The steamer had started, and there was on board a lady apparently of a very religious turn of mind. She conversed seriously with the passengers, and had frequent prayer-meetings, at which she deplored the wickedness of this world, and described the next as glorious beyond conception—a place of perfect happiness and peace. The passage had so far been remarkably fine, but a heavy gale came on. The boat made bad weather of it, and things began to look serious.

The lady asked the captain if there was any danger, and he said, "There is always danger in cases like the present." She said, "You don't mean to say there is a chance of our going to the bottom"? He said, "There is always a chance, but you must put your trust in Providence." She replied, in great alarm, "Good gracious, have we come to that?" Now this lady, when the weather was fine, evidently thought she believed, but in the storm and danger she must have realised that it was pure imagination and not real.

Holt, Norfolk.

B. A.

Believe what? I believe that the Deity is an absolute being, and as such entirely free from the human limitations of space, time, and relativity. Further than that, no man knows anything of the nature of the Deity, however much he may profess to do so. It is indeed impertinent to think that we can enter into His counsels, or to seek to offer Him our puny advice for the government of the Cosmos. All present conceptions of God are conceptions of man's mind, taken from the facts of man's own experience, purely human. Man conceives God as having personality—a purely human limitation, and on to that limitation man adds purely human attributes. Man's gods in every age are the reflex of his own thought, and advance with the growth of man's own knowledge. It is an unjust conception of an All-just God to say that He has condemned any of His creatures when He has made them what they are. Do we believe in free will? This is a crucial question. Though he knows that all the other phenomena of experience are governed by the inevitable working of natural laws, man in his blind conceit fancies his own actions are an exception. Yet they, too, are governed by natural laws,

on determinable lines. This does not do away with responsibility. Responsibility is not based on an utterly arbitrary and capricious power called free will, but on knowledge, which is determinable, for it is entirely a matter of education. Do we believe in the doctrine of the Fall? All the evidence of modern science is against it. The history of mankind has been a long and painful struggle upwards. Because we happen to know that we are not at the top of the hill, we are not justified in assuming that we have fallen down it. I cannot believe in the doctrine of the Fall, nor in its necessary attendant, the doctrine of the Atonement. Incarnation and resurrection are ideas found in mythologies far older than Christianity. Christianity neither has a monopoly nor was the originator of them. Christianity claims to be a Divinely revealed religion. Other religions make the same claim, and with as much justification. To my mind the one true religion is the religion of humanity, common under all climes and creeds. Do the good for its own sake, not for the hope of ultimate reward, which is a selfish and ignoble motive. Faith is a phase of imaginative emotion. It is the choking of the reason by the blind acceptance of what we are told to take for granted without any possible proof. There is no ethical virtue in the unquestioning acceptance of, say, the doctrine of Incarnation, nothing but a purely selfish sense of satisfaction and individual comfort.

ANOTHER UNDERGRADUATE.

Hertford College, Oxford.

The average attendance at churches of all denominations on Sundays is to some extent an answer to the question, "Do we believe?" and I therefore propose to quote some statistics on this subject, taken from elaborate



tables framed in 1881 by the Rev. Andrew Mearns from a census taken by seventy-two local newspapers of the church attendance in their several localities. It is calculated that 58 per cent. of the population might attend church on Sundays, and that this is not an over-estimate appears from the fact that 79·06 of the population were in the various churches in Bath on one Sunday in 1851. The average attendance in the churches of all denominations is in the morning 16·54 per cent. of the population, in the afternoon 3·78, and in the evening 21 per cent., and the attendance at all the services by different individuals is reckoned by adopting Mr. Horace Mann's suggestion of adding to the morning congregations one-half of the afternoon and one-third of the evening congregations. It is estimated that 70 per cent. of the population might be present at one of the Sunday services, while the actual attendance at all of them combined is 25·4, or considerably less than one-third of the number who were in church on one Sunday in 1851 at Bath. The disparity between the attendance in proportion to population in various towns is very remarkable; for instance, in 1881 it was 75·02 per cent. in Bath, and only 26·43 in Liverpool. The collective percentage of the eight towns, Bath, Bristol, Coventry, Ipswich, Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield, and Warrington, declined from 50·83 per cent. in 1851 to 43·22 in 1881; and whilst the attendance at Coventry increased from 40·17 in 1851 to 45·23 in 1881, that of Warrington decreased from 59·06 to 32·17 in the same period, or nearly one-half. The average collective percentage of attendance at church in the seven towns, Bradford, Derby, Hull, Liverpool, Northampton, Portsmouth, and Southampton, for morning and evening services diminished from 43·14 in 1851 to 33·27 in 1881. In the case of Derby, the decrease between 1851 and 1881



was from 49·68 to 38·39; in Hull, from 46·93 to 40·93; in Liverpool, from 42·52 to 26·43; in Northampton, from 55·03 to 40·28; in Portsmouth, from 42·37 to 40·06; in Southampton, from 54·19 to 37·86; whilst it increased in Bradford from 33·46 to 36·61. The attendance at church in Germany seems to be very much smaller in proportion to population than in any part of England, for Sir Hiram Maxim tells us that only 2 per cent. of the population attend church in Berlin, or less than one-twelfth of the average attendance in England. The *Dundee Advertiser* has made a decennial census of the attendance at churches of all denominations in that town for 1881, 1891, and 1901, and it is shown that it has diminished by about 20 per cent. in that time. Supposing that the attendance at church has decreased at Liverpool, for instance, to the same extent between 1881 and 1901 in proportion as it did from 1851 to 1881, it would now be 16·37, whilst it has sittings in churches for 179,196 persons, or 33,184 more than the number who attend. I observe that at Widnes only 11·09 per cent. of the population were present at religious services in 1881, but, as in nearly all towns there has been a considerable decrease in church attendance since 1881, it is probably about 9·85 now. I may add that the clergyman of a small country parish, with a population of about 600, informed me that only about 10 per cent. of the adult males in his parish attended church, the remainder of the congregation being women and children.

Marlow.

AN EX-M.P.

We hear very little about Hell nowadays. Protestant clergymen, as a rule, try to explain it away as a figure of speech, &c., or discreetly say nothing about it, but as there is the same authority for believing in it as ever there was,

and as it remains part of official Christian doctrine, there are still a lot of people to whom it is a reality and a source of the greatest concern and unhappiness, either on their own account or on that of friends or relatives. Oliver Wendell Holmes said he could not understand any sensitive and kindly person who held this belief not going out of his mind, and I myself believe that it accounts for nearly all cases of religious mania. A solemn and complete repudiation of this doctrine by the high dignitaries of the Church of England assembled in conclave would, I think, decrease the sum of human unhappiness more than any act it is in their power to perform.

Aintree.

ANTIBRIM.

The question, "Do we believe?" gives rise to the further one : Is there need to believe ? and, further still, Can we believe ? Is not the questioned belief absurd ? Can any reasoning being believe in the existence or righteousness of the Bible-revealed God, who withheld from His people through countless ages the knowledge of His omniscient wisdom and love, His power to save and to confer immortal life, and only revealed it to a select few (the Western races, if you like) in a comparatively modern age ? What of the unnumbered millions of souls who departed this life in every continent of the known world before Christ's advent in utter ignorance of His salvation, and of the millions upon millions who, since His death, have never heard of the Gospel of Christ, but have pinned their faith (which has led them on to heroic action equal to that of a Christian martyr) to all kinds of grotesque and unnatural-looking objects—their gods ? Belief in their damnation is utterly abhorrent, and inconsistent with that love of God which indeed passeth all understanding. And yet they are undoubtedly damned if the only true religion

be that revealed in the Bible, and Christ the only medium of approach to the Father—"None cometh to the Father but through Me." Can we, therefore, really believe?

London.

CARLEOL.

In these days, when so much agitation is going on regarding religious education, it should be important to know the opinions of our teachers, to whom is entrusted the imparting of orthodox ideas to the rising generation. I have a tolerably large acquaintance with the teaching profession, and I must say the great majority do not believe. Many live in terror lest their opinions should become known, but others openly and emphatically denounce Biblical instruction, while they still continue to give such lessons under compulsion. I leave to others to judge of the effect of such teaching, and to say whether they desire this hypocritical state of things to continue. For myself I must have been born a sceptic, for I very early began to notice that the people around me, though sober, honest, and industrious, paid but a formal heed to worship or religion. Though acquiescing in Church services, they never read their Bibles or prayers, or perhaps ever thought of doing so. One man I heard of boasted he had read the whole Bible through while undergoing imprisonment for poaching. He was neither better nor worse for the experience, only in the matter of reading he was champion for that district. I early began to notice that what the Bible said about God, angels, miracles, and so forth, was nothing at all like the world I lived in. God did not communicate with anybody, saint or sinner, as He did in the days of Abraham; nor did He send angels, or prophets, or even dreams that were to be relied upon. Therefore I concluded all such stories were not very instructive to us—perhaps not very true or wise.

I continued in a somewhat uncertain mind until, while a student at college, I met a man who had been trained for the Church, but had turned tradesman. He showed me that the Messianic prophecies in the Book of Matthew could not in any sensible way signify in the original what they are made to signify in the New Testament. That opened my eyes to the fictitious nature of the Christian religion. I have been a pretty attentive student of the Bible since, and I have discovered, to my own satisfaction, that a great deal of it does mean what it is commonly supposed to do ; part of it is mere commonplace ; and much, particularly in the Prophets and in the Epistles, is mere mystification, from which all the commentators during two millenniums have been unable to extract an intelligible meaning.

Aberdeen.

PETER RAMUS.

I should think that if all the people in this country were asked to give an answer to the question the reply of the majority would be in the affirmative. But if, again, these same persons were asked why they believed, I wonder how many would be ready with logical reasons? It is quite natural that believers should predominate when nearly every child that is born has its mind invaded by Christian teaching. Parents teach their little ones to believe and to ask no awkward questions. Consequently, having been allowed no independence of thought on this question in childhood, they grow up firmly convinced of the truth of all they were taught in the nursery. What is this belief worth, obtained as it is in so many cases by bribes of eternal joy and threats of eternal pain? For years every attempt to investigate the teachings of the Bible has been met with the cry, " Believe, or be damned."



It is a pleasure to me to think that each century has produced a few brave men who have not bartered away their reason at the command of popes, priests, and bishops. To-day the Churches scowl at them, and the narrow-minded brand them as polluters of decent society, yet the world is becoming more tolerant, and the name "infidel" is losing some of its former opprobrium. Belief must always be the result of evidence. Christianity thrives in an atmosphere of blind credulity, but withers away in the strong light of evidence. Some people believe the Bible to be an inspired work. If that were the case one would expect to find no mistakes, no false theories, no unjust or cruel laws, and so forth. It would be the acme of perfection. Many believers admit that it is only the work of mortal man. Then it must contain many mistakes, and every one who attempts to point them out deserves our thanks. Many of the sayings of Jesus were wise and grand. Still, we must remember that much of His teaching was taught by men living centuries before Him. The golden rule, which is placed in the forefront of Christian teaching, was laid down as the highest precept of morality by Confucius 500 years before Christ, by Pittacus of Mytelene 620 years before, also by Aristotle and many other philosophers. Is it quite fair that Christ should be given all the credit for enunciating it? I believe I am right in saying that many people cling to Christianity because, even to this day, the expression of opinions contrary to orthodox belief is met by social ostracism, loss of caste, and even of trade. Mean people will be found in every community willing to indulge in this petty persecution. We can have nothing but admiration for the many earnest and hard-working ministers of all denominations who are sincere in their belief, and whose acts are making for good in the world; but is not a great deal of



the indifference and unbelief that Christians complain of due to those whose daily actions are the very contradiction of the lessons they teach? Mr. John Morley has said : "All religions die by being found out," so let us be of good cheer, and try to hasten on the day when miserable wrangling and disputes over creeds and dogmas will trouble us no more—when every one, believers or unbelievers, will work together for the common good.

National Liberal Club.

ROY G. HOPKINS.

An unimportant unit of the world's thinkers, I write to thank you for the opportunity this discussion has afforded me of gaining an insight into the minds of my fellow-creatures. Like many of your correspondents, I am incompetent to discuss the question in the abstract, either theologically or scientifically ; I can only offer personal experience. The offspring of parents both teachers in Anglican Church schools and compelled by their profession to teach daily the dogmas of Christianity, surrounded through childhood and youth by the element of religion, it seems strange that I can never remember having any belief in the God of the Bible. I say it with all reverence, I never considered such a representation as worthy of the Great Unknown. A passionate lover of Nature from babyhood, my companions were always the flowers, trees, birds, and animals, and (left motherless at three) I wandered happily among them, always in joy or sorrow sure of their sympathy, none the less felt because voiceless. When the time came for me to take up a regular course of study, Scripture became one of my strongest points. The Old Testament narratives interested and amused me, but never convinced me of being anything more than a confusing conglomeration of legends.

Fearing to give pain to my dear father, I hid my doubts, and though he lived for many years he never had any conception that the faith was not as dear to me as to him. Will this little deception go against me in the hereafter, I wonder? I base my firm belief in a future state on the indisputable law of evolution and general progression, the upward aspiring principle of the universe. The instinctive longing for a better state of being, where the God-given spirit of me will rise, untrammelled by materialism, convinces me of the existence of such a state. With all due reverence I ask, Why should we deem our Creator less just and merciful than ourselves? Who more than an Englishman resents the idea of one man suffering for another man's sin? The general outcry in the unforgotten Beck case confutes the belief. What dignity is there in a religion which holds the Almighty capable of acts against the perpetration of which any honest man would rebel? It is small wonder that churchgoers call themselves miserable sinners, as they must certainly feel themselves to be so if they really believe the man Jesus suffered and died for their sins. It seems to me the whole spirit of His teaching has been missed. I accept Him as a great reformer, but I see no proof in any of His words that He was more specially the Son of God than any one of us, His creatures. As virtue is its own reward, so is sin its own punishment, and we make our own heaven or hell here on earth by our own acts. Many reasons will be given for my blindness, undoubtedly, but my undefined religion brings me so much happiness that I sometimes venture to hope that it is because I am so near to the Greater Light, I am blinded to the lesser. Never a day passes but my whole heart goes forth to my Maker in thanksgiving for the life, love, and peace with which He blesses me, and though I have had many a hard blow in

my life, I can always trust Him and look upon such trials  
as

"Machinery just meant  
To give my soul its bent ;  
Try me, and turn me forth  
Sufficiently impressed."

South Kensington.

A VERY HAPPY WOMAN.

We cannot make a planet, or even a grain of sand. We cannot make the lowest form of vegetable or animal life, but they are made ; therefore, there is, far beyond us, a creative power, a Creator, a God. No one can deny that. Is there a future existence ? Yes ; most people will admit that matter is indestructible, and that the " vital spark " which animates our brains no more ceases to exist than the other substances of our bodies. Do I believe in the Bible ? I believe in the testimony of the rocks rather than in the reputed writings of Moses, a character I cannot admire. Do I believe in the Divinity of Christ ? I am sorry I cannot believe in Him as more than the greatest teacher the world has ever seen. I cannot think the great Creator made sin, and had to sacrifice His Son to save from eternal punishment such a paltry few of the creatures of His own making. I have discussed religion with the most learned Chinese, Hindoos, Mohammedans, Esquimo, North American Indians, fetish men and cannibals in tropical Africa, and I conclude that if we could have a religious conference, here or at The Hague, we should get rid of a great deal of sacerdotal fraud and have a little left we could all believe without question.

BORDERLAND.

Over forty years ago Professor Jowett wrote in his essay " On the Interpretation of Scripture " the following words, which are peculiarly applicable to the question under dis-

cussion : "No man can form any notion, from what we see around us, of the power which Christianity might have if it were at one with the conscience of man, and not at variance with his intellectual convictions." Allow me also to call attention to a portion of a speech delivered at the Leicester Diocesan Conference on October 25, 1889 : "Christianity, however, made no claim to rearrange the economic relations of men in the State and in society, and he hoped he would be understood when he said plainly that it was his firm belief that any Christian State carrying out in all its relations the Sermon on the Mount could not exist for a week. It was perfectly clear that a State could not continue to exist upon what were commonly called Christian principles, and it was a mistake to attempt to turn Christ's kingdom into one of this world. To introduce the principles of Christianity into the laws of the State would lead to absolute intolerance." The Bishop of Peterborough is responsible for these sentiments. One more quotation from "Essays and Reviews"—the essay on "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England," by the Rev. Mark Pattison : "When an age is found occupied in proving its creed, this is but a token that the age has ceased to have a proper belief in it."

#### OUTCAST.

Mr. R. Overton assumes that the Gospels are an absolutely truthful record of the teachings and career of Jesus. How does he justify this large assumption? He thinks that in the Sermon on the Mount suffering and perplexed humanity may find panaceas for all its woes and solutions of all its difficulties. Yet a distinguished English prelate, the late Archbishop of York, Dr. Magee, declared, when he was Bishop of Peterborough, that if the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount were reduced to practice, Society could



not hold together for a week. What would become of us if, when the thief or the swindler sought to take away our coat, we gave him our cloak also? If we gave to every one that asked us? If, when our right eye offended us, we plucked it out and cast it from us? If, when confronted by the burglar or the assassin, we followed the command of Jesus to "resist not evil" and lay passive beneath the robber's ruthless hand or the murderer's gleaming steel? These are some of the teachings which Mr. Overton says are "perfect, reliable, and beautiful," and can be "personally" tested. Who is there amongst the vast army of your correspondents that has personally tested them? When and where, during the whole of the nineteen centuries of the Christian era, have the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount been relied upon as "perfect and beautiful" and "personally" tested, except by isolated enthusiasts like Francis of Assisi and Count Tolstoy? It is not true that "a young Jewish villager has, by a few casual remarks, flashed light through the moral darkness of a world." The light was there before He came. It shines in the Old Testament, and in the lives and teachings of the Stoics; it was flashed through the Eastern world by Zoroaster, Buddha, and Confucius centuries before Jesus was born. We are asked, "What cause was adequate to produce Jesus?" But who will tell us what Jesus was? Where can we find a sober, coherent, and reliable biography of Him whose example is said to be "admittedly perfect"? Take away the miracles from the Gospel records, and how scanty are the details which remain! And what is the good of pointing mankind to an Exemplar who lived in a supernatural atmosphere, whose life was marked by miracles at every step; who, in short, was not man at all, but God incarnate in the flesh? Mr. Overton would have us believe all the statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospels,



on the ground that the ethical teachings of Jesus were true and beautiful. But here we reach "the spot where belief or scepticism really begins." May we accept the Gospels as trustworthy records of the life of Jesus? How does Mr. Overton, or any other man, know that Jesus "declared He would be crucified and would afterwards rise from the dead"? Until this question has been frankly faced and satisfactorily answered it is premature to ask, "Did He tell the truth or not?" On one point at least we can bring the matter to a decisive test. The synoptists tell us that Jesus prophesied that He would come again, "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," to gather together His elect and judge the world, and that to this stupendous prophecy He added the declaration: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." Did this happen or not? The bones of the generation to which He spoke have long since mouldered into dust. Let that dust answer. If we affirm that in this matter His biographers have misrepresented His utterances, we destroy the authority of the Gospels, and we have no longer any ground whatever "for believing in all His other equally surprising and equally important declarations."

14, Curzon Street, Nottingham.      W. B. COLUMBINE.

Though in my 93rd year, and a sufferer from some of the ills of old age, I have been following with great interest the wonderful correspondence that has appeared. When I was a young girl such openly-expressed opinions on religious subjects would have been regarded with horror, if even they would have been allowed to be put into print. Many of the letters are excellent, and some of them quite fall in with my way of thinking, for I am a devout worshipper of the Almighty. I thoroughly believe in the efficacy of

prayer to Him, and hardly know what I should have done without that blessed resource in a life beset with difficulties which, for the moment, appeared insurmountable. So I thank God for having inspired me with trust in Him and reverence for His blessed name. I also thank Him for having blessed me with loving, dutiful children, and permitting me to see my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But, judging from a few of the replies, faith in the Creator, with constant prayer to Him for help and guidance, besides good acts, go for nothing unless accompanied by belief in the so-called Son of God. We are, I hope, all sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, but I cannot conscientiously believe, nor is there any evidence that I know of to show, that the "Son of God" was God Himself in the form of man. Until that evidence is forthcoming I shall continue to worship the Father, and endeavour to abide by His precepts, with the hope that He will one day receive me into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Brighton.

THE NONAGENARIAN.

If there is a true religion, then the Supreme Being who originated it has not revealed it unmistakably to mankind. This has been a huge misfortune for the human race, for differences of religious opinion have filled the world with bitterness, hatred, persecution, torture, and bloodshed. To give a few instances : In France, the extermination of the Waldenses and the Albigenses, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, with its accompanying horrors ; in Spain, the Inquisition and the persecution of the Jews, besides the attempted invasion of England by the Spanish Armada and the attempted extermination of the people of Holland by the atrocious Spaniard Alva ; in England, the persecution of the Lollards, the fires of Smithfield, the persecution of the

Nonconformists and the Quakers ; in Rome, the burning of Giordano Bruno by the Catholic Church ; in Geneva, the burning of Servetus by the Protestant Church. To come to the present day, the municipal authorities of this city are trying to obtain extra Parliamentary powers to enable them to suppress the disorders caused in this district by the dissensions between the two great Christian sects. There is great bitterness of feeling, and it has, at times, been very difficult for the police to prevent Catholics and Protestants from attacking each other. If the believers in the many various religions maintain that their particular faith is the true one, sent to them by the Divine Being, then I think they ought to find an answer to the following question : If yours is the one true religion, why has it not been, from the beginning, demonstrated to the world in such a clear manner that there could not be two conflicting opinions regarding such an important matter ? As it is, the doubt, confusion, and anarchy of opinion which prevail as to which is the true faith have often caused human beings, with the best intentions, to treat their fellows with such atrocity as might be displayed by Red Indians on the war-path.

Liverpool.

MONTE CRISTO.

Would you care to know if artists believe ? I am one, so I can speak from some experience, while others may give their own views upon this not unimportant subject. I think most artists will agree that, as a general rule, they are much too busy, or ought to be, with the brush or the chisel to give particular attention to religious discussions about creeds, doctrines, dogmas, and so forth. Art is long and life is short, while, according to the wise Sir Joshua, "Whoever would excel in painting, or, indeed, in any other art, must bring all his mind to bear upon that one

object from the moment that he rises till he goes to bed." So, you see, an artist has not much time for thinking over spiritual matters, or for going to church, and that is, perhaps, why we usually find him in his studio on Sundays, improving the shining hour with an art which has been called Divine. But an artist can believe all the same, and does so as a rule. Indeed, it is often his business to believe. Fra Angelico, the priest-painter, was of opinion that holy thoughts and holy works were indispensable to every limner, more particularly to those engaged in depicting scenes or characters from scriptural history. The late Sir E. Burne-Jones was of a similar way of thinking. In fact, most of the great masters of ancient and modern repute were religiously inclined, or they could never have left to the world so many noble works of the kind which appeal to the believer and, again, to the connoisseur. When studying the Divine art in Italy and Spain I met with many a native artist who began his day by going to church for inspiration, with the belief that his devotions there would assist his labours at the easel. But then, our foreign *confrères* get up much earlier than the sons of perfidious Albion, while their places of worship are open every day and at all hours, beginning, say, at six a.m., so that life is longer with them than with us. The great Spanish painter, Fortuny, whom I knew personally, was numbered among sincere believers, and as much may be said of his brother-in-law, Madrazo, and of not a few French and German artists, who, if Bohemian in their habits, are, as a rule, religious-minded. Yet, with few exceptions, our modern votaries of the brush and the chisel have not devoted their talents for many years to sacred art. How is that? Is it that Apelles is less pious than formerly? Or can it be that Cræsus, the connoisseur or art dealer, no longer believes? At any rate, he does not seem to believe



in Saviours, saints, and seraphic heads—on canvas. So, perhaps, this is why artists do not believe much in depicting them. I do not for one.

Savage Club.

WALTER GOODMAN.

Do we believe? "Oxoniensis" asks. I answer for myself and a fellow-sinner here and there, "Oh yes, as far as that goes, we believe." We believe because, whether we wish it or no, we have some of that faith which is the evidence, and the only evidence worth counting, of things unseen; that faith which is the mind's consciousness of God's revelation to the soul. We believe in Christ's message as the message of God. But, for following Christ, that is another matter. We take Christ's life and death to show that this world is no place for the transcendentalist. Many generations of bishops, priests, and deacons have tried to engineer a compromise between Christ and the world, and the measure of their success can be gauged to-day from the fact that, in the twentieth century of the Christian era a nation which should adopt practical Christianity would lose its national existence within the year. But let us, at least, be honest about it. We insult Christ less when we walk openly, though sorrowfully, away, than when we sing a *Te Deum* for a successful butchery, or profess to be living in the spirit of Christ's teaching while claiming that the letter is too unpractical to be taken seriously. "*Faut vivre, monsieur*," says the professing Christian apologetically, and where is the divine who has the courage to answer "*Je n'en vois pas la nécessité*"?

London.

BRUTAL TRUTH.

It is a difficult time for the clergy and for the Church. It is not, as "X." says, the "sin of unbelief," but it is the



"tragedy of unbelief," with which they have to deal ; but how shall the clergy deal with it when for many—I will not say most—the tragedy overshadows their own spiritual life ? I have heard many sermons during the past few years which prove beyond a doubt this grim overshadowing—men arguing with themselves, against their reason, trying to silence their own doubts, along with those of their listening congregations, with "stereotyped forms of words, conventional apologetics, nebulous assurances." These must be as utterly insufficient for their own needs as for the needs of us others, so deeply unsatisfied by and impatient of the dogmas and tenets of "orthodox religion," whatever the Church or sect. Surely for the clergy it is the hardest part, for whatever doubts force themselves into their unwilling thoughts, they dare not—they cannot—honestly voice them and acknowledge them as we, who are not what—for want of a better word—I may call professional Christians, can do. But even so they now dare to speak from the pulpit in language which must have been condemned as rank heresy not so many years ago. The infallibility of the Bible narrative, anyway, as regards the Old Testament—this Rock of Refuge—has crumbled from under their feet. They acknowledge it—miracles are now explained as parables. It is hard for them to draw the line between parable and fact. In spite of, and perhaps because of all this, there is surely more of the real spirit of Christ abroad now than in the days when there was less acknowledged unbelief and freedom of thought. What splendid work is being done for the poor, the sick, the fallen, the unfortunate ! What high ideals are held by many men and women among these many Agnostics, whose lives more resemble those of the Christ than the lives of some who pride themselves on their belief in orthodox religion !

Side by side with this is the complacent toleration of the unashamed part taken in evil which "X." so ably exposes. This to thinking minds must be the deepest stain on civilised nations; on nations professing to be followers of the Christ. The far-reaching evil it represents cannot be exaggerated. Alas! we cannot all hold the simple faith which brings the calm serenity and "peace of God which passeth all understanding," which we all must have seen in others, which has called forth highest admiration and deepest longing. But we can hold by and seek peace of mind in the feeling and the conviction that a great spirit of good, whom for all men and for all nations we call God, is ever present in our spiritual lives helping us to battle against the evil in ourselves and others; helping us to help each other. In this we shall find our peace of mind. For the rest, I believe I speak for many when I say we know little—we hope much.

Hatch-end, Pinner.

V.

How can we believe the Bible, on which all Christian religion is founded, when those who are set over us to teach us its truths do not believe in it themselves? They preach from their pulpits that this part and that would be better cut out of the Church lessons; they discuss in books which had much better have been left unwritten the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ, and discuss the subject in such a way as to make one lose the little belief one had. We are told "a house divided against itself cannot stand"; surely the same may be said of religion. If a man will follow the dictates of his own better nature, and earnestly strive to live an upright, honest life, what does it matter if there is a future life or not? If there is, he has nothing to fear, having done

his best; if there is not—well, he will be none the worse off for having done his duty towards his fellow-creatures.

Hoddesdon.

A DOUBTER.

The question of the Oxford man who likes to Latinise his cognomen is so general as to class itself among things impossible. Who are We? If the query be confined to the small body that claims to represent orthodox Christianity, then the answer may be, Yes. If it extend beyond these limits, what is it to embrace? And in either case the stupendous counter-question has to be considered—Believe what? Who can say, in the present day, that the creed of fifty years ago is still acceptable? When "Essays and Reviews" appeared there was a flutter in the dovecotes that could not be produced to-day by literature far more unorthodox. When Darwin expounded the theories which Anaxagoras had foreshadowed and Monboddo trifled with, the sanctified trembled and the devout shuddered. But who to-day dare speak slightly of evolution? Where are now the theories of Socrates and Plato, who represent the Essenes and Neo-Platonists? Who can assert that the Sermon on the Mount was free from Vedic wisdom, and uninfluenced by the grand teachings of ancient Egypt? Why have we so long neglected the Avesta Zend, the Upanishads, the lore of the East of priceless value? Who are We? The Salvationist, screaming his blatant theories, represents a section as infallibly as the mild curate feebly following in the steps of Pusey, or the rigid Low Churchman, whose essence is the narrowness of the Puritans. The philosopher will smile at the petty squabbles of sectarianism and those who say they know; the philologist will stand aside in awe of those who dare

positively to assert ; the Agnostic is only saddened by the assurance of those who are certain where his deep research causes him to remain in indecision or negation. Who are We? When hundred-gated Thebes was first in wisdom and civilisation Britain was in its lithic stage. While London advances in higher thought, remote spots of England are mediæval in their modes and theories. Who, then, are We, and what are we asked to believe? The mathematician does not discuss conic sections with his barber ; the architect does not go for enlightenment to the postman ; the philologer does not seek advice on runes or Hittite script from the statesman or surgeon. Is it not colossally apparent that belief is modified by surroundings, by research, by individual mental ability, and that to ask generally of all the world, Do you believe? is both paradoxical and absurd? Two minds cannot think alike ; two followers of any creed cannot be identical in their mode of interpretation. If the question, "Do we believe?" is to be confined to the tenets of that limited number who say they know and are saved, it is not worth answering ; for few dare to assert to-day that all Jews, Turks, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Brahmans, and millions of other clean-living and holy people, are excluded from the hopes that animate the village vicar and the blatant followers of "General" Booth. The narrow-minded vicar has his way, the Boothite his, and a million others theirs ; and each is right in his way, and (do not forget) fighting for the same end. Religion in the abstract is a science. The Egyptians had their esoteric teaching (not necessarily mysteries, but not comprehensible to the mere acolyte), as well as the Greeks, the Buddhists, and the Christians of the present day, whose higher criticism is too deep for those not profoundly educated. We do believe, but we believe differently. If your



Oxford man had asked the question, "Do we all seek to read, to unravel, to comprehend?" the answer must infallibly be "No." Belief is a matter of evolution, and nothing else, and what is suited to one age is absolutely rejected by another; what was heresy yesterday is permissible to-day; what was illegal last week is legal this, according to the exigency of circumstances, the ruling of the Legislature, or the dictum of the Synod. Great minds through all time have always differed, and always will. What were the beliefs of Macaulay, who said all Europe roared with laughter at the blessing of a sword by the Pope? What was the belief of Tennyson, who says:—

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds"?

What was Hugh Miller's belief, when he failed to reconcile Science with Hebrew fable? What could Carlyle believe, when he talks of those who speak "whimperingly of one just man"? What did Beaconsfield believe, when he asserted that all great minds had one religion, which they spoke not of? The age is passing through an epidemic of infidelity to old ideals. What form a revival is to take neither "Oxoniensis" nor I can tell you.

THOMAS SHAIRP.

I, Stanhope Gardens, Bournemouth.

It may safely be said that amongst the waverers, the sceptical, and the absolute unbelievers, a very considerable proportion are the offspring of God-fearing parents, and have had all the advantages of a strictly moral and religious training. Speaking for myself, I may say that more faithful adherents to Christianity than my parents it would be hard to find, notwithstanding the trials and



troubles of this world, of which they had many. When their six daughters were taken away one after the other in their girlhood, or little past their youth, my mother was constrained to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." More fervent and beautifully tender prayers were never offered up than those that rose from my almost sainted mother's lips. Yet, when I call to mind the preposterous ministrations of some of the preachers in those days, it is easy to understand the great change that has taken place in many minds as they have grown to maturity. The ministrations I am referring to were those that had for their main subject eternal damnation. I will never forget, in the year 1858, one notorious revivalist—a Primitive Methodist—who preached fourteen sermons a week, and held a greater number of prayer meetings, for a period of three months in a large chapel at Chesterfield. The people flocked from miles around to see and hear him. They came for a sensation, and were not disappointed. He struck terror into most of their hearts, and drove many of the women into hysterics. There was so much fire and brimstone in his sermons you could almost inhale the fumes. He thumped the pulpit so hard and so often on one occasion that the gas globe fell with a loud crash on the floor beneath, and drew from him the exclamation, "Thank God ! that's not my soul gone down to Hell." Well, I attended many of these services, and what was the effect upon me at the age of eleven ? Why, sir, times out of number did I dream that I was standing at the judgment seat of God, on whose right were the sheep, but on whose left were the goats. I always found myself among the latter, with no prospect but the eternal torments of Hell. If any culprit ever feels worse than I did while these dreams lasted he has my deepest sympathy. I recently

told a barrister friend of this, and he said it was exactly his experience. Well, my point is, that similiar ministrations to the above have been common in all parts of the country, and have been the chief factor in casting ridicule and doubt on the Christian religion. It is owing to this class of preaching and teaching that so many have discovered the impossibilities and contradictions in the Bible, and are now unbelievers. My belief is the time to be happy is now, and the way to be happy is to endeavour, as far as possible, to make others happy.

36, Lime Street, E.C

BERNARD DRABBLE.

Ministers of religion will never be effectual in dealing either with the great body of Agnostics, who say "We do not know," or with the Atheists who declare dogmatically 'There is no God,' because with both these classes the evidence that ministers of religion bring is out of court. It is useless to quote the Bible to the man who only regards that book as literature. To the Agnostic the argument that no flaw has ever been found in the character of Christ is no proof at all of the special relation to God claimed for Him. Then that Blougram-like argument that even if there is no God and no hereafter believers will be as well off as Agnostics, while if there is, then the former have the better of the situation—does it not stultify any claim of a "just God"? Again, what proof is it of "belief" that there are so many people present in church or chapel? Do not some people go to church for business purposes and some to satisfy the gregarious instinct; some as merely respectable persons and some rather as artists than saints? But how many really believe in the belief they recite—that Christ was born of a Virgin Mother, that there was a Hell into which He descended, ascending again after three days? Do

nine people out of ten really believe in a Hell? Leaving out the Baptists, I doubt it. May not the indifference complained of by the Churches be in large part due to a new principle at work—the individualisation of religious belief? Are we necessarily indifferent to religious feeling because we pay less attention to the officers of regimented Christianity? Pippa passes, and methinks hers is the clearest voice. Was it not a celebrated Anglican clergyman, who, writing a letter one Christmas morn, said in it, "All the fools have gone to church and left the universe for me"? May not the peace which passeth all understanding be found by many more easily on Reigate-hill or Box-hill than in church or chapel? And can there be no renascence of wonder at all the mysteries of the universe and of man without the accompaniment of a belief in Hell or the devil?

Kingston-on-Thames.

F. P. WARREN.

If the recorded experience of mankind makes any one principle clearer than another to the discerning mind, it is this—that the conscious pursuit of truth and justice, not a problematical "happiness," is humanity's best security for ensuring individual and social well-being. What is the spiritual remedy, or precept, proffered to his weaker brethren by that physician of the soul, the Apostle Paul? "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Is not this also in the "medicine chest": "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him. . . . And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"? And again: "Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour." The majority of your correspondents, in claiming expressly or implicitly a unique religious character for the Christian religion, appear to be wholly unaware of the

fact that the truly religious and ethical element therein is no less an heritage from teachers and systems that went before it than are the present-day delusions of theosophy, telepathy, and spiritism, generally the *damnosa hæreditas* of the Middle Ages and still earlier ignorance? I believe it is because of that perversion from its true application of this ethical element in Christianity, its overlaying by quite adventitious rites and ceremonies, and the persistent identification of incredible dogmas with sound moral principles which is the burden of innumerable sermons and of official Christianity generally, that force thousands of reflecting men and women to declare emphatically to-day, "No, we do not believe in your 'Christianity'!"

Shepherd's Bush.

AUSTEN PECK.

There was a time when I believed, or, rather, when I did not doubt (for there seems to me to be a difference here). My position in those days was that of a schoolboy of thirty years ago, who "got up" his physics or his chemistry from a text-book, which supplied facts and figures he never questioned, nor had any means of verifying. Since then my troubles, in their chronological sequence, have been (1) the seeming imperfections of the Old Testament God; (2) the insincerity of professing Christians; and (3) the fact that Christ gave (apparently) no teaching about our relations to the so-called "lower animals." My first two difficulties are felt by very many of your correspondents, but I seem alone in experiencing the third. Now, I couldn't believe in a religion owning a God capable of creating animals for some of the purposes for which we use them. How could a just and merciful God intend us to breed and slaughter them for food? How could He make the cure of human diseases

depend on the discoveries made through vivisection? How could He seem to tolerate blood-sports, or even the ordinary amount of ill-usage to which we subject our unfortunate horses and donkeys?

Stroud Green.

ONE WHO CAN'T BELIEVE.



**SECTION IV**

***SERMONS AND ADDRESSES***



## SECTION IV

### *SERMONS AND ADDRESSES*

#### ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

(DR. RANDALL DAVIDSON)

PREACHING at Canterbury Cathedral on New Year's Day (after the correspondence had been closed), Archbishop Randall Davidson selected for his text Luke i. 79, "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." He said : Occasions sometimes come to every reasonable Christian, especially on the opening of a New Year, when, determining to make a new start, we reckon up the past and forecast the future. It is, perhaps, wholesome at such a time as this to ask what difference in our position is made by the Christian faith ; how far has a believer in the Christian creed a right to regard life differently from one who does not hold that creed—what, in short, is the position of our faith with reference to us at the dawn of a New Year ? The text I have chosen tells us that the object of Christ's coming into the world was to give us light and to guide our feet into the way of peace—to give us light instead of darkness, to give us guidance amid our perplexities, and to give us peace instead of turmoil. The words were spoken first at the dawn of the new dispen-

sation, and they have proved true to every generation since. We assemble to-day in Canterbury Cathedral, with its lessons of the past, its daily stimulus for present needs, and ask whether it is right to form high hopes for the future. Can we dwell upon this text as giving us a clue to what would otherwise be an insoluble perplexity and enabling us to go forward with a better heart? A good many of us hear people ask, sometimes triumphantly, sometimes in bewilderment, sometimes in sorrow—Is the Christian faith not growing out of date? Can it be that in one sense it is played out: that it has done its work, and is to be replaced by something else? Such inquiries, I think, have reached most of us in our experience among our fellow-men. During the last three months the inquiry has found voice—as many here must know—in a curious way. A great journal has devoted many of its columns every day during these three months to a discussion by letters from all quarters of the question, “Do we believe?” That has gone on, I say, for three months and more, and only closed yesterday. Hundreds of letters out of the thousands received have been printed. I cannot claim to have read them nearly all, but out of the kindness of those who are responsible I have had the opportunity of reading many scores. Before going further I should like to say a word about that newspaper controversy. The interest awakened by the discussion must, I think—indeed, it most certainly has—surprised those who are fond of speaking of modern England as caring little about religion. For myself, I have always believed, and for many years have maintained, that, notwithstanding all our failures and folly and cowardice and sin, there are now more people in England than there ever were before who are intelligently—mark that qualification, for it is important—intelligently caring for and holding to the

Christian faith. How far this correspondence confirms that view people must judge for themselves. To me the answer seems not obscure. One point I should like to make. When that controversy was opened in a thoughtful letter by an able man he tried to set out in plain terms what he understood to be the religious position, or the Christian position. He said, "The religious assumption is that the world is not of value or importance in or for itself, but solely as a preparation, or, as some would say, a state of trial, a probationary sphere, in view of an awful world that is to come." Now it has surprised me to find what complacent acceptance has been accorded by scores, perhaps hundreds, of the letter-writers to that statement. In the sentence itself there are not a few ambiguous phrases. If it means—and such meaning appears to have been given to it by no small number of writers—that this world is only important in so far as it is a probation, a testing of the individual for the real thing—that is, what is to happen afterwards—then I should dispute it altogether. This world and its life is a preparation, it is a testing-time, it is a probation, but only as part of one great whole. The life of a boy is a preparation, a testing-time, a probation, if you will, preparatory to the life of the man. Is, it, therefore, in itself an unimportant thing? Does it not have its own inherent weight and place for its own sake in the well-being of the whole, and the well-being of the individual too? It is an inherent part of something bigger. It is so with our life here and our life hereafter. In the words of Browning:—

"The race of man,  
Which receives life in parts to live as a whole,  
And to grow here according to God's clear plan."

One of the very things which Christ's coming did was to teach people the unity of the whole, here and hereafter



and it is of huge importance, therefore, in itself what a man is doing here and now. The acceptance of what seems to me to be at the best a mistaken way of putting something that has truth in it, vitiates, I cannot help thinking, no small part of the correspondence of these many months. The correspondence is in itself of profoundest interest to us all, as giving an insight into what people—perhaps we ourselves—are thinking, and how we try to formulate our thoughts. It is a revelation in several ways of the strange misunderstandings current about the creed of Christendom, and it ought to be for that very reason a real help to Christian teachers of every kind throughout the land. On New Year's Day our thoughts should be large and simple, and I should like to say a word upon what I believe to be the difference to the world which the acceptance of the Christian faith has brought about. The thought is very common in modern life, and the correspondence I have alluded to shows it in rich abundance, that it does not greatly matter what we believe or think. What alone matters is what we do. That is not a new thought. It found expression in very early times, both within the Church of Christ and outside it. More than a century ago it was put into words by Alexander Pope, a man of genius—crotchety, an invalid, a Roman Catholic, and in many ways eccentric, but none the less a genius. He said:—

“For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,  
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.”

Obviously a real truth underlies these lines. Conduct is what matters. Christ said so—“By their fruits ye shall know them.” They are His own words. Belief by itself, independent of action, is worthless. As the Apostle reminds us, devils also believe and tremble. The mis-

take made in the two lines I have quoted lies, I think, in trying to sunder and keep apart the two things—Belief and Conduct. How are you to get at right conduct? Take the average man who has to face in life day by day mysteries which it is impossible for him to fathom, contradictions which grow more apparent as experience lengthens, confusions of all sorts in what men think and say and do, and rampant forces of evil on every side. He has to try and conquer these things, and he feels, "It is all very well to resolve, it is all very well to live in the right if I can; but I neither know enough, nor am I strong enough for that task." Across this turmoil comes the message of the text I have taken, telling the purport of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. There came a time in human history when a life was lived here on earth wholly unlike that of any other man, and He who lived that life might claim its origin, its character, its meaning to be absolutely apart from the life of any other man. It ran its course for thirty-and-three years, and it closed with the uplifted cross, then the open tomb, and then the consequence before the eyes of man. The lesson was learnt and lived. There are those who declare that that life of His is still going on, that He can and will help men, and that not by example only, but by His living presence. That is set forth in the existence and the constant use of such a building as we are worshipping in to-day—a use of a thousand years. From the Christian creed, which is simply a summing-up of the Gospel message—from the Christian creed, rightly understood, I get at once the motive and the strength for that outward daily conduct which admittedly is what really matters. It is from that creed that I derive alike the motive to do it and the strength for the endeavour. Take the last section of our Christian creed, and you will see that it is

the motive force of my conduct and yours to-day. "I believe in the Holy Ghost"—the inspiring and willing force that shall make a difference to my life ; "the Holy Catholic Church"—all that gives me a corporate life for ministerial or sacramental aid, all that it has done in centuries past, and is doing for others all the world over ; "the communion of Saints"—with its memories, its links, its hopes ; "the forgiveness of sins"—the one thing that sets me free now, in spite of all my failures, to go forward hopefully, light-heartedly, because I know in whom I have believed, and I know that these sins of mine have been forgiven for His sake ; "The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting"—the thought that when this life is over my entire being, raised a spiritual body, will have the responsibilities of life, and the life that God has assigned to me continuously then. Now these things are, as has been described, a great bundle of motives, every one of them potent beyond words, to make it possible for me to set to work so that my life shall be in the right. Contrast the man who, basing his action upon thoughts like these, goes forward in that strength to make his conduct a reality and a force for conquering what is evil in the world, trampling down what is cowardly and wrong, and maintaining what is pure and lovely and of good report. Contrast that with the thought expressed by the lines which I have quoted from Pope, and ask yourselves, How is the man to get his life in the right unless there be some mode of faith behind? Everything depends upon that. A life so motivated, so inspired, so armed, so equipped, is the life which can, and will, make the conduct be what it ought to be by the grace of God. Now, friends, you and I have offered to us now as we start another year the motive, the inspiration, the

power to start it as men and women who have deliberately made up our minds to be faithful to our baptismal and our confirmation vows. It is for us, on a day like this, to ask ourselves quietly whether that deliberate choice is ours, whether that deliberate plan is now so firmly rooted that we expect it to be carried into effect as the year runs on. On New Year's Day of all days we look forth, we sum up, we think largely, our prayers ring out and swing far away, we think of nations and their needs and trials and growth. We are remembering just now the fearful devastation and slaughter and sorrow of one of the most terrific wars the world has seen. We speak to-day to the Prince of Peace, we ask Him to bring it to an end in His own time and way. Our own life, local or personal, may often look insignificant to ourselves. It does not so look to Him, without whom no sparrow falleth to the ground.

The Archbishop concluded his sermon with an earnest appeal on behalf of rescue homes, which he described as one of the most needy, and yet one of the most sorrowful and sad of all the characteristics that belong to our modern life.

## ARCHBISHOP OF YORK

(DR. MACLAGAN)

St. Mary's Church, Newington, from the text : "Let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. vi. 1). Perfection should be the aim of the Christian life, and progress was its necessity. Too often, he feared, from Sunday to Sunday, and even from year to year, there was a low level of Christian performance. Bible-learning was nothing in itself ; to their



knowledge should be added a practical experience in their sphere of life, which should enable them to "go on unto perfection."

## BISHOP OF LONDON

(DR. WINNINGTON-INGRAM)

Preaching in the Crypt Chapel of St. Paul's Cathedral, the Bishop of London selected for his text St. Paul's words, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. i. 16). He remarked that a determined effort was being made at the present time to make men intellectually, morally, and practically ashamed of the Gospel, hence his selection of this text as peculiarly appropriate. Taking up a well-known daily paper, he found this question put: Do we believe? The writer said: "The fatal defect, which mars the value of the Congress, is that it takes too much for granted. It starts from a platform which is not universally accepted. It chatters about details, when the very ground plan is not settled. The assumption on which it proceeds is that we all believe, and that we are all Christians. But do we believe? and if so, what? Are we Christians? and if so, in what sense of that ambiguous term? This is the preliminary question, the problem of all problems, which troubles many sensitive and thoughtful students, who look on the world as it is, and contrast it with the world as the divines complacently regard it."

Then the writer turned to the Sermon on the Mount, which, he said, contained a series of ideals:

"The ideal of poverty.

"The ideal of humility.

"The ideal of 'turning the other cheek' (the absence of revenge).



"The ideal of self-sacrifice.

"The ideal of loving an enemy.

"The ideal of innocence.

"The ideal of sexual purity, in thought, as well as in action.

"And here are some of the axioms of the world's creed :

"The ideal of wealth.

"The ideal of ostentation, smartness, notoriety.

"The ideal of self-assertion and blowing one's own trumpet.

"The ideal of trampling on others and rising at their expense.

"The ideal of personal enjoyment, selfishness, refined or coarse.

"The ideal of compromise (the politician's ideal).

"The ideal of 'sowing one's wild oats,' and 'a rake makes the best husband,' &c.

"The ideal of fashionable impurity."

And yet further on the writer observed: "Have I drawn the picture too harshly? Good Heavens! Think of the millionaire calling himself a Christian in the face of the text, 'How hardly shall they that have riches (or trust in riches) enter into the Kingdom of God'! Think of the politician calling himself a Christian in view of the texts, 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon,' and 'Ye shall not do evil that good may come'! Think of the sensualist calling himself a Christian confronted by the text, 'Whosoever shall look upon a woman ——'! Think of our smart leaders of society calling themselves Christians and repeating the words, 'Blessed are ye poor—blessed are ye when men shall hate you and revile you and persecute you'! I am not a preacher nor a prophet, although I am afraid that my theme tends to be didactic. I am only an observer of life. And I ask, do we believe?"

That is an attempt (observed his lordship) to make us practically ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Are we ashamed? If not, why not? I will take up each point in turn. First, are we intellectually ashamed? Why am I able here to-night to say that I am not intellectually ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? Look into the grounds on which it is alleged that we ought to be ashamed. They are: Insufficient evidence of the facts. Belief in miracles which contradict in many ways the enlightened idea of the twentieth century. It is quite clear that, but for number two, number one never would have made its appearance. We cheerfully believe in the murder of Julius Cæsar on about one-twentieth of the documentary evidence on which some reject the resurrection of Christ. As to the Four Gospels, they come out of the crucible of modern criticism, in my opinion, ten times as strong as they were before. When I was lecturing here four or five years ago we were speaking of the new light which the investigation of Prof. Ramsay in Asia Minor had thrown upon the Acts of the Apostles—a discovery which turned doubt of their authenticity to a certainty in his mind that they were a first-class piece of evidence as to the condition of the Roman Empire in the middle of the first century. I should be content to rest my case of not being intellectually ashamed on the documentary evidence of the writings of St. Paul. In these stand out the belief of St. Paul in the Resurrection and the Incarnation. In the light of recent controversy, can it be thought possible for a man to say what St. Paul said and yet not have believed in an actual Resurrection? Surely those are driven to strange straits in argument who, to avoid the conclusion that a miraculous event had happened, try to drive a wedge in between the testimony of St. Paul and that of the other Apostles. The real reason for being intellectually ashamed is, we

are told, that the Gospel is a story of miracles. Let me say at once that those are ill defenders of the Faith who endeavour to make the Faith easy for outsiders, and undermine the faith of those who already believe. It is the worst policy of defence to throw over the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, or our Lord's power over disease and death, and then expect to keep the belief of the world in His Incarnation, His virgin birth, and His Resurrection. There is an economy in God's working, and a special economy in His use of the miracle. The only objection to the feeding of the 5,000 is, that it is something which we do not see happen before our eyes to-day. So far, then, from being intellectually ashamed, I glory in the miracles. They lift me from the petty tyranny of the present, and remind me of the Great Arm ever at work behind what we call the law of Nature, for every law of Nature requires a continual application of force. The miracle does not break any law of Nature, any more than a man's finger breaks a law of Nature when it saves a spider from drowning, but it brings in the action of the Great Will of the Universe, which we must suppose to be as free in its own world as it allows us to be in our smaller world. "After all," says a writer, "what is called a miracle? It may be nothing more than the result of some unknown natural law. What is miraculous to one age of the world is commonplace to another age. What persons in certain conditions of life may regard as incredible, others, in different circumstances, may find the ordinary experience of life. What human being can profess to know all these laws? . . . The laws of Nature are the regular working of force which men have inferred as existing in God's universe. Those laws do not exist before God. He does not profess to be bound by them. It is the will of God over Himself." But if the miracle does not contradict the modern

reverence for the laws of Nature, what other enlightened idea of our time does? Nothing of influence except rank materialism, which is not science, but is opposed to true science as much as to religion. Is the day of Marconi's wireless telegraphy the day in which to say that things are impossible to God? In all probability we are only at the beginning of the wonders which lie in this marvellous universe. If, therefore, there is no reason to be intellectually ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, in what way ought we to be morally ashamed? Is Christianity like a passenger left behind by a coach and calling it to come back to take up? It would take too long to state the part which the Gospel has played in the morals of Europe. It was the Gospel that taught morality in Europe. It was the Gospel that brought the stream of purity and hope to Rome. It was the Gospel which civilised the wild and warlike tribes of Germany. It was the Gospel which converted the barbarous Briton. And when we turn to the Labour movement, which from the mouths of some owes nothing to Christianity, I am prepared to show that the workmen of to-day owe the four things they value most to Christianity: their freedom, their homes, their education, their hospitals. It was the old Gospel that taught the dignity of labour, that gave woman the position she occupies to-day, that inaugurated the schools until the State was taught to take them in hand, that produced the passion of pity for the suffering, and that raised our hospitals. It is the Gospel which sends out night after night an army of faithful men and women to rescue the fallen; it is the Gospel which started our settlements; it is the Gospel which is purifying the life of this great city. When I see this great moral influence I am not morally ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As to the future, why are we to expect that what civilisation has never



been able to do in the past it is going to be able to do in the future? There are no signs of it. All Socialistic dreams are hopeless unless men are unselfish, and unselfishness has never been attained except under the power of religion. And if not intellectually and morally ashamed of the Gospel, is it true that practically we are ashamed of it? Is the answer to "Do we believe?" "No, we are only pretending to believe: we are laughing in our sleeves all the time?" The writer of the article from which I have quoted really answers the question when he says: "I know there are many quiet and religious people who live simply, who do justice and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God." Although we believe that this number is far greater than the writer seems to imply, we have no quarrel with his answer. It is only those converted by the Gospel whom we pretend are influenced by it. It is the steadfastness and reality of the Christian on which we base our case, not the conduct, or the bearing, or the lives of those who happen to live in a so-called Christian country. This was all the Apostle himself claimed. If we can show that in increasing numbers the Gospel has led men and women to lead the life of the Sermon on the Mount, and is bracing them in their troubles, curbing their sinful passions, leading them to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God, there is no reason why practically, any more than intellectually and morally, we should be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

## BISHOP OF WORCESTER

(DR. GORE)

University Church, Oxford: The time they lived in was a time of widespread religious unsettlement. It would



be indeed hard to exaggerate the uncertainty of belief in many classes of society. This was due in part to—what was their weakness—the faculty of criticism, which far outran the constructive faculty of their minds ; but it was also due to what was a legitimate matter for thankfulness, namely, that there had been a wide extension of scientific and historical knowledge, and this widening of the intellectual horizon, with the accompanying change in the methods and categories of men's thoughts, almost necessarily carried with it religious unsettlement. The creed that had associated itself with the forms of thought of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries must have a difficulty in adjusting itself with the history and science of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. They could not evade this difficulty. There were, indeed, those who thought that the only proper way to meet religious unsettlement and scepticism was to hold fast by religious belief as they had received it, without concession or adaptation. To allow mistakes in the common teaching of the Church was described as a dangerous concession and regarded as only the first step to surrender, and parleying as the prelude to treason ; but, in fact, experience showed them in the past that religion in a settled age became encrusted with ideas which did not belong properly to a creed, but to the thought of the time. What tests had they by which they could ascertain what was the real permanent Christian creed ? What was the real revelation of God, true, permanent, and Divine ? The test which to every man's own mind was practically the most convincing was also the least producible in argument ; it was what might be called the mystical or subjective test. It was impossible in any way to seek to withdraw the historical basis of Christianity from the freest and frankest criticism. If there existed persons who said, "Let the Old Testament be frankly

criticised, for it is not so important, but not the New Testament, for it is vital," the claim must be utterly, and was of course, repudiated. He believed that the faith of the creeds was supported by free inquiry into historical facts, and they reached practically universal agreement that the witness of the New Testament could be shown to have taken shape so early that it might be strictly historical—that it fell within the conditions which they admitted of thoroughly good history. On the other hand, there remained obscurities, difficulties, large gaps in the evidence, and the historical possibility, which could never be denied, that conjectures or mistakes might very rapidly have become imaginary memories. Thus it seemed always, if they endeavoured to probe the matter to the bottom, as if the question whether these recorded events actually happened, miraculous and supernatural as they were, would almost always be answered in accordance with what a man's mind was as to the probabilities of Divine action, in accordance with what he thought was generally credible and probable.

## BISHOP OF EXETER

(DR. ROBERTSON)

Stoke Damerel Church, Devonport : The question might be formulated into the somewhat different words, "Do we hope?" They all, in some sense or other, believed in human progress. They believed that, although progress in man's command over Nature had been very wonderful, the most important progress, which separated the Christian civilisation of to-day and the Christian man of to-day from the barbarian and the savage, was man's conquest over himself : in other words, that real progress was moral

progress, and that what was best in their nature was valid and destined to endure. If that were so, was it not the case that religious belief, Christian hope, were indissolubly linked and allied in the constitution of their nature with all that could justly be held to form any part or parcel of that most important factor in human progress, the only kind of human progress that was really important, namely, progress in man's power to control himself and subordinate his lower self to his higher, and give not only reason but conscience and love their due places in directing and swaying the actions of man? The cause of religion was the cause of morality.

## BISHOP OF MANCHESTER

(DR. KNOX)

Manchester : They found the newspapers discussing at length the question "Do we believe?" If they looked at history they would find over and over again the same cry. Indeed, he thought the cry was only absent when the Church had been really, if unconsciously, undergoing corruption. Now, on looking back from a higher standpoint of history, they saw that those days of prosperity were very often the most evil days, and that when the Church was faithful, and doing her duty, then the conviction was most borne in upon her that the "days are evil." The Church might not gather all into her fold, but if she were faithful her influence would so leaven the world that evil customs would one after another be broken down and the world redeemed from the power of evil.

# BISHOP OF OXFORD

(DR. PAGET)

Wantage, Berks : It was well for them to be thinking over the grounds of their faith, and to look at the example of those whose faith had held through trial, and to see what it meant to profess the faith of Christ. From time to time many men in all ages of the world's history had found it hard to keep up their loyalty of faith, and to keep their hearts set steadily towards Christ as their Lord and Master ; but if there were times when clouds gathered in the sky, and the air was no longer bright, clear, glad, and exultant, it need not mean any real strain of their allegiance, for it was one of the trials which God sent them. If they were to search people's hearts far and wide they would find, in one after another, a clear, though perhaps unspoken, expectation of One who should put right what was wrong in this world, One who would, it might be in the dim future, yet still would, somewhere and somehow, make fair what now seemed hard, who would vindicate the hope of righteousness, and speak peace unto His people.

# BISHOP OF ST. ALBANS

(DR. JACOB)

St. Albans Diocesan Conference, Walthamstow : At no time previously had the Christian religion been more criticised than at the present day. There was criticism and criticism, and while some had seriously alarmed the Christian conscience, others had let in a flood of light upon the Word of God and the religion of Jesus Christ. For his part, in face of the scepticism which seemed to be

prevalent to-day, he would say that the man who grasped that the Lord Jesus Christ was the centre figure of the Old and New Testaments, and believed in his heart and life that He was indeed the Son of God, could afford to await results with the assurance that in the end he would triumph.

### BISHOP OF BATH

(DR. KENNION)

Yeovil: It was good for many men to ask themselves the question, "Do I really believe?" and the result of it all had been to make men see that, on the whole, there was a great deal more real faith and trust in God and His dear Son than perhaps they were disposed to think. His lordship spoke strongly in defence of the Scriptures, pointing out the failures of the attacks on the authenticity of several of the Epistles and Gospels, and said that through all the storms of criticism the Divine personality of Jesus Christ came out with far greater clearness and brightness.

### BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

(DR. WILBERFORCE)

Rochester Diocesan Society's Festival at St. Saviour's Collegiate Church, Southwark: If the clergy could catch the spirit of St. Paul how much easier their work would be! They were hindered by small things—pin-pricks and little darts, which were most annoying—but St. Paul looked above these, and always kept the great horizon before him. They should recollect that one of the principles of their work was that their conflict was not against the squalor, misery, sin, triumphant lust, devastating drunkenness, and the great tide of iniquity around them, but against in-



visible enemies. Some of their dangers were partisanship, poisoned jealousy, and discontent, against which he earnestly warned them, reminding them that they should look upon each other not as "high, broad, or low," but as "fellow-labourers with God."

## BISHOP MYLNE

(FORMERLY OF BOMBAY)

St. Mary's Church, Marlborough, Wilts : They had to consider not so much the indications of the Being of God from the orderliness of the world, but rather those indications which sprang from the mind within. Man came as the crowning-point of conscious life in this world, and with man there had always been a conscious progress towards spiritual perfection. The progress of man towards moral and spiritual perfection was bound up in and depended upon the fact that man believed himself to be spiritually in feeling with a better and higher world. He would ask them, did man's well-being and his participation in a higher existence depend upon what he had, or upon what he could do? Did it not rather depend upon what he was himself? Love and self-control were the highest privileges of man preparatory to a perfect existence. His moral and spiritual progress had developed his sense of right and wrong, and man's sense of right and wrong had quickened his conception of a higher existence.

## BISHOP OF KENSINGTON

(DR. RIDGEWAY)

St. John's Church, West Ealing : "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself"

(1 John v. 10). The difficulty of believing was a familiar expression, and yet its familiarity could never for us diminish its sadness. All through the recent discussion on belief that had filled the columns of one of the daily papers, all through the unspoken opinions of those silent multitudes who might not write to the papers but who did not think the less, there ran this conviction: That it was exceedingly difficult to believe, that it required an almost unnatural effort to believe, that, if it did not amount to credulity exactly, it meant, at any rate, an extraordinary faith to accept the fact and doctrines of the Christian creed. He wanted to suggest that there was another point of view, one which we did not hear of half so often, but which the time had come to insist upon—not the difficulty of believing, but the difficulty of refusing to believe—not the question, “Is it hard to believe in God, in Christ, in the future life?” but the question, “Is it not harder not to believe?” After all, what did it mean to believe? It might mean that a man was called upon to accept truth on the evidence of others, evidence that he had never examined for himself. But if that was so, was there a man in that church, or outside of it, who was not doing that every moment of his life? To believe was hard? How much harder was unbelief, for it meant that a man must unmake himself, must shut his eyes to the probabilities of truth, and turn his back upon the peace and happiness of life. He had to refuse to listen to the whisperings of that higher consciousness of his, that still small voice which spoke for God within. It was by the power of that higher consciousness that many a man was able to say he believed, not because he had argued out his belief, but because he knew and felt it was true. Again, it was harder not to believe, because unbelief reversed the

whole experience of the world. It was hard not to believe for another reason, because unbelief ignored the probabilities of the truths of religion. The time had come for Christians to abandon defensive tactics and take to attack, to throw the burden of proof on those who would destroy the palace of the truth of Christ; the time had come for saying that it was unbelief which was unreasonable, that refusing to believe in the Christian religion was not a refusal of the possible, but a refusal of the probable. The foundation truths of religion—the Divinity of Christ, the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ, and the life of the world to come—these things were not mere possibilities; belief in them was belief in the probabilities of truth. Lastly, not to believe was to turn one's back on peace and happiness in life. When a man lay on his death-bed, or sat at the death-bed of one near and dear to him, was there much peace or happiness in the dreary creed of unbelief?

## BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK

(DR. YEATMAN-BIGGS)

St. Paul's Cathedral (the annual medical service of the Guild of St. Luke): England is a profoundly religious country. We have been asked, "Do we believe?" I say emphatically we do, but we do not always care to say so and to meet the consequences. If we did, the face of England would be changed, in Parliament, in society, in commerce, in marriage, in our homes. Courageous in all else, the gentlemen of England have not the courage to say what they believe. Owing to the unutterably inadequate religious education of the upper and middle classes, men have suspended judgment. A false liberality has

dethroned conviction. But such a service as the present, in which doctors are not ashamed to demonstrate the dignity of their profession and its worthiness to rank with Christ's faith in His Church, this is indeed a profession of belief, a true "Religio Medici."

### BISHOP OF ISLINGTON

(DR. TURNER)

Highgate Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Highgate School : The widespread work of the society was continual evidence on the part of Christians that they thoroughly believed in their religion, and that, in spite of some differences of opinion on such questions as the higher criticism, they attached the greatest importance to the study of the Word of God by Christians in all parts of the world in their own language. The mere existence of the society's Bible House in Queen Victoria Street, where the list of versions included names of 370 distinct forms of speech, was a witness to their belief.

### BISHOP HAMILTON BAYNES

(FORMERLY OF NATAL)

All Saints', Derby : A great many people who found themselves compelled to return a negative answer to the question, "Do we believe?" were very like the Psalmist. The question would come to various people in various forms. For some it would seem the inspiration of the Scriptures ; with others it would be regarding this or that miracle ; and with others with regard to a particular doctrine. But beyond all these considerations there was

this supreme question which came home to them at times: Was there, after all, a heart behind all things one saw, and behind the mysterious powers of the world? The more they thought the more baffling became the question, and it ended with some as with the Psalmist—they were tempted to doubt. In the sanctuary of God the problem became plain, especially when they came there, as they did that day, to ask God to give them a higher and a better view of life. In the time of sickness they learned the lesson, and came to a due sense of the proportion of life and to realise how little worth were those things which before seemed all-important. They came to see that there was one thing, and one thing only, which was worth having in life, and that was centred in the love of and communion with God, and love and service for their fellow-men. God tried their belief with many tests, and there was no better test of the vitality of their belief than the way in which they estimated their responsibility for the maintenance of their hospitals. He urged them, in proportion to their means, to show that their faith, at all events, was equal to this test.

## BISHOP OF STEPNEY

(DR. COSMO GORDON LANG)

St. Edmund's Church, Lombard Street. Subject, John the Baptist's inquiry as to whether Christ was the Messiah, and Christ's reply (Matt. xi. 2): The meaning of that answer was that the Messiah had come, and that there was a personality in the midst of men, out of whom went the energies of life to restore and redeem. Was there none who could sympathise with the doubt expressed by John? The world seemed to be so advancing that Christ



seemed to be retreating. Where were the signs that the power of Christ was increasing in the world? When they were in doubt as to whether Christ was really the King, the Lord, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, what answer did they receive? He did not think they would ever receive an answer which would silence every doubt. But there was an unseen personality in the midst of men, and the only proof they could have in their life that Jesus was the Son of God—that He was a living power among men—was when they found that there was at the very centre of their life one unseen but real personality, out of which went energy to revive and refresh them. No one who knew that could ever doubt that Jesus lived.

## DEAN OF WESTMINSTER

(DR. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON)

Westminster Abbey : Text, "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee" (Psa. ix. 10). From the earliest times the Christian Church had required that a confession of belief should accompany Holy Baptism. They were baptized in a sacred name, and thereby brought into relation with a Divine Being who revealed Himself to them under that name. Hence it was fitting that they should declare that they knew with whom they had to do; that they should make some confession of His Name. The Catechism said that their godparents promised in their name that they "should believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith." That seemed at first sight a large and startling demand. What was intended by the words? They did not mean, in the first place, all the thirty-nine articles of religion. Those were not compiled at the time the Catechism was written, and they were not

binding on the English layman. He was free to use them for his guidance, but he was not asked to assent to them. The more of theology he knew, and the more of English history he knew, the better he would understand and appreciate them ; the more clearly he would see their purpose for their own age and their value to the present age. Beyond that the laymen had nothing to do with them. Secondly, neither was the so-called Athanasian Creed imposed on the layman as a condition of communion. Much mischief resulted from the forgetfulness of that. Nor, thirdly, was it required as a condition of communion that every member of the Church should hold the sacramental teaching which the Prayer Book so plainly enforced. Right views of the sacraments were of very great importance ; but they might not exclude a man from communion for lack of them. One of the most striking differences between the Church and the various sects which had gone out from her lay in the fact that in the sects the bond of union consisted in identity of opinions or similarity of religious experiences. Certain views or certain professions of spiritual experience marked a man off as a Baptist or as a Wesleyan. But the bond of the Church was sacramental. No views about the sacraments or the Church made or kept a man a Churchman. It was the sacraments themselves that made and kept him one. His baptism in the threefold name of God made him a Churchman ; in his confirmation he acknowledged himself a Churchman ; in Holy Communion he found the strength to live the life of a Churchman. Accordingly there could be a very wide liberty of thought, a very great diversity of views, among the members of the Church. The familiar clauses of the Apostles' Creed were the articles of their belief upon which the Church primarily insisted. Those were the words which, day by day, or at least Sunday by

Sunday, the layman stood up to utter with his own lips in the solemn service of God. He who could answer, "All this I steadfastly believe," might know that he believed as a Christian man should.

## DEAN OF CANTERBURY

(DR. WACE)

Canterbury : The Voice of God and the Word of God had been subject to many attacks from the first time it was heard, and he was afraid that there were signs that at the present day these attacks were increasing. It became necessary for every thoughtful person, whatever his position or views might be, to consider what were the grounds they had for the faith they had always maintained hitherto, and what were the answers to the objections in respect to the entire truth of the Bible and its claim to be called the Word of God. The influences which tended to disparage the Bible were largely based upon suggestions that a considerable part of it, and particularly the early part, was not, as the critics were fond of saying, to put the matter softly, "historical"—they rather shrank from saying those parts were not true, although they meant that they were not true. If they looked at the facts, the most extraordinary thing that appeared to him to result from all recent information respecting the Bible was its extraordinary correspondence with facts of history that they never dreamed of a thousand, a hundred, he might even say ten years ago. Let them take the Book of Genesis from that point of view. The Book of Genesis dealt on a broad scale, in what they called a kind of scene-painting, with the great movements of the whole race and the great empires which existed before the time of Abraham. Now

one hundred or even twenty years ago people did not know anything really historical about many of the movements of empires and nations which were referred to in the Book of Genesis ; but since that time a number of Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions had been deciphered, and they had found passages in the Book of Genesis, quite unintelligible before that time, which were in exact correspondence with statements deciphered on the monuments. He sometimes thought it was one of the most remarkable pieces of Providence that the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis should have been preserved. That chapter, they would remember, told of the expeditions that certain kings made in the time of Abraham, and of Abraham afterwards attacking them and rescuing Lot. Now that chapter until a very short time ago was so, to use a familiar expression, in the air that they did not know of any historical circumstance in which it could be placed ; and accordingly a distinguished German critic about thirty years ago said, with great confidence, that it was certainly unhistorical, that the whole story was fiction, based upon the Assyrian conquest of Palestine in later times. But since then the very names of princes mentioned in that fourteenth chapter of Genesis had been found exactly on the Assyrian monuments. They had, in fact, in those monuments distinct records of the invasion and conquest of Palestine and the Western regions by the Babylonian prince of that day, and what was still more extraordinary, they might buy for 1s. or 2s. the whole code of laws inscribed on the monuments by that very prince. Professor Sayce had discovered that the names in that fourteenth chapter of Genesis corresponded exactly with those monuments, and it therefore followed it must have been a true contemporary record, and that it must have been written down at the time of

Abraham himself, or, as they would see, they could not possibly have had the names of those kings corresponding exactly with those on the monuments.

## DEAN OF BRISTOL

(DR. PIGOU)

Churchdown, Gloucestershire : An opportunity had been given to unbelievers as well as believers to express their personal convictions. After remarking that though the Church machinery was much more elaborate than in the early days, the same power of prayer was not manifest, Dr. Pigou spoke of the infidelity he had witnessed during a three-years' residence in Paris, and stated that Germany was honeycombed with rationalism. They could, he said, thank God they had not reached that state in this country. Though there were many disquieting signs, he believed that in the hearts of most of our people there was a profound belief in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. He thought the erection of such churches as that at Churchdown was as good an affirmative answer as any one could give to the question propounded in *The Daily Telegraph*. "Do we believe?"

## DEAN OF MANCHESTER

(DR. MACLURE)

Manchester Cathedral, before the Lord Mayor of Manchester and members of the Corporation : The principles of the Sermon on the Mount would settle every difference in every city and State, would unite all classes, and would establish universal peace and happiness in the City of



God, of which every earthly town should be a counterpart. It was the divorce of morality from religion which had led to the breakdown of social and civic life. It was that which had led to the pertinent question put forward in the columns of *The Daily Telegraph*, "Do we believe?" The New Testament never pretended to conceal the dependence on a sovereign power in the heart of every man, whose counsel he must seek, and whose dictates he must obey if he would save his life. It was by that salutary influence of the individual life of each member of the social and civic state that the life of the community should be saved.

## DEAN OF PETERBOROUGH

(DR. BARLOW)

University Church, Cambridge: There are, as we all know, inquiries raised from time to time respecting the zeal which is shown in any particular age by the servants of God for His glory. Such inquiries have their limits, and also their uses. Amongst ourselves a recent question has gone forth in the words "Do we believe?" The standard fixed by the Lord Himself is this, "By their fruits ye shall know them." If, therefore, we can say that service is being definitely rendered to God—service philanthropic, educational, evangelistic, and pastoral at home, and if abroad the claims of the colonist and the heathen, of the Jew and the Mohammedan, are being more and more considered, with a power that springs from obedience to Divine commands, and with a sympathy that comes from the knowledge of facts—then, as grapes do not grow upon thorns, and men gather not figs from thistles, we may receive the comfort of hope, and be

assured that, as good works are the fruit of faith, so, where such works are found, there must be the underlying and sustaining principle of belief.

### DEAN OF ST. ALBANS

(VERY REV. WALTER LAWRENCE)

Responding to the toast of "The Bishops and Clergy and Ministers of Religion," at the Chelmsford mayoral dinner : He was convinced that Englishmen did believe. Whenever there was a national crisis they always found that the people of England went to the footstool of Almighty God, to supplicate or to give thanks to Him. This showed that as a nation we did believe, and that when our feelings were most deeply touched those who did not believe wore their hearts on their sleeves and went on their knees to thank or supplicate God.

### ARCHDEACON SINCLAIR

St. Paul's, Haringay : Text, "Put on the shield of faith." The question of faith was the question of what we believed in, the Christian religion or any other religion. The question had been debated with considerable point and ability in the columns of a daily newspaper for some weeks. One might not feel a daily paper was the place for such a discussion, but it had not been without its effects. It had enabled people to see where the difficulty was and to look into the grounds of their faith and be more set and grounded in their faith than ever. We were surrounded with mysteries. So far as actual scientific knowledge was concerned, there were a great number of things we did not know. We did not know scientifically

how the universe began, whether matter was eternal, the secret of light, the meaning and nature of such a common thing even as electricity—as to its origin—or the origin of the laws of Nature. We did not know the meaning of time and eternity, the soul, of life and death, and a great many other things. They were profound mysteries from the scientific point of view, and we had to form the best theory we could. When we had formed that view we called that belief. Belief was not only reasonable, but a necessity, a natural instinct to every human being, and that was necessary to our existence, to our studies, to our progress. We had the Divine voice of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. The blessing was in proportion to our faith. Faith raised us above the petty mortifications which beset men in their daily lives. Many wanted the Bible proved scientifically, and he had shown there were many things that could not be scientifically proved. There was one supreme motto: Believe—believe God and His Son. All things are possible to him who believes.

### ARCHDEACON WILBERFORCE

St. John's Church, Westminster. Hosea xiv. 4 and 5: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely. . . . I will be as the dew unto Israel." The transcendent power of the Divine "I will" appealed so cogently to his own heart, and answered so fully the desponding letters he had received during the past few days, that, following a week of anxiety, it was comforting to have the positive assurance of the world's Creator conveyed to them in the words of the text. Not to believe it was perpetually to despair. It was impossible to believe that any other course was open, and they must learn to labour and to wait. The image of moral loveli-

ness which God was ceaselessly evolving in them would ultimately overcome all. To those who said that could not be proved, he would reply, not only in the words of Hosea, the prophet, but that it was the unanswerable testimony of man's inmost being. The heart of man was the mirror of God, only a reflection, "the glass through which we now see darkly." Their common humanity was a reflex of God's "I will heal." The instinct which sent Florence Nightingale to the Crimea proved the existence of an instinct of rescue which was itself an indubitable index of an origin. Man received from God the instinct of healing, for God was the universal Healer, and He would see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. That great truth must result in the demolition of the terrible dogmas which had borne so bitter fruit in the past. The world, in spite of its degradation and wretchedness, was yet full of love, and the many instances of those who gave their lives for others formed a ceaseless protest against the human conception of God, and constantly rebuked the creed-cramped and narrow religion and the cold indifference of many. In the text lay the promise of the unfolding of God's purpose. Spiritual truth could not be reduced to a mere equation ; it could only be conveyed by imagery, allegory, and symbolism, and it enabled thousands to believe in the threefold purpose of love contained in their text, and in the words of Tennyson :

"To feel, although no tongue can prove,  
That every cloud that spreads above  
And veileth love, itself is love."

He exhorted them to act as though God had said to each one of them, "I will heal," and to believe, in spite of all, in that as the permanent attitude of God, which nothing could alter.



### ARCHDEACON HODGES

St. James's, Bury St. Edmunds : Some people suggested that persons could not be expected to believe what they could not understand ; but such an idea was arrant nonsense, as everyday experience testified. It had been said that Christianity was a splendid hypocrisy. That statement was untrue. Millions of men and women embraced the verities of the Christian faith. Amongst those in the first rank of science were devout Christians.

### ARCHDEACON DONNE

Before the Mayor and Corporation of Wakefield : I once preached before a corporation as I do this morning. About four o'clock I went down to the station to meet the train, and met the mayor on his way to his country house. Better than his thanks was a bit of real information from the bottom of his doubtful mind. It actually came to this : " I am sorry for the clergy, sorry for all of you, and for all ministers of all denominations, because you have to preach every Sunday what you don't believe." I thanked him with all courtesy, and told him he was completely and entirely wrong, but my friend did not believe me. This good mayor, who is miles and miles away from here, shall be a useful friend to my dying day, and a warning as to what is the real and honest, if mistaken, view of many laity at the present time. . . . Alas ! if the Christian creed could be accepted without doubt and without inquiry, as many have accepted evolution, we clergy should not be accused of preaching that which we do not believe. May I ask you to read a book, the title of which is " Doubts about Darwin " ? Evolution may yet



become an interesting phase of thought in the Mid-Victorian epoch, and much else that it is the fashion to accept may pass away. Evolution, of course, will always contain splendid facts and truths, but there is at the present time no sign whatever that the mind of God, as directing a world of progress, is not at work now and ever has been at work upon the anvils of His world.

### ARCHDEACON WILSON

Wesleyan Central Hall, Manchester : Was the Christian of the twentieth century bound to adopt the ethics, as they were called, of the Sermon on the Mount ? or, to put it plainer still, under our existing scheme of life, with wars, competition, luxuries, poverty, amusements, gin palaces, and workhouses, was civilisation, if professing to be Christian, an organised hypocrisy ? The answer to that question was "No" ; but it necessarily required much consideration and development. Christ was everywhere teaching the ethics of temper, not laying down rules of conduct immediately and universally applicable. If they mechanically applied as rules of conduct Christ's ideals of temper, they were certain, from common sense, that universal pauperism, lawlessness, and national extinction would follow. The Christian temper was not to abrogate, but to work through and modify these laws. The Christian spirit was a leaven, a light, a seed, a force, not a code, and it could only modify, transform, and consecrate, and not suddenly revolutionise and modify this world of men as they found it. To be a Christian was not to go outside the world, but to make in the strictest sense the best of it ; to have faith, praise God, and to find one's true life outside of oneself. Intellectual beliefs of any kind could

not be the real foundation of the Christian faith, however closely intertwined the two might be. A Christian must believe in Jesus Christ, as showing God's nature. They might be unable to accept or understand many things men had said about God and Christ ; but they rested on the broad ground of the vast experience of the world, and the testimony of their own conscience, that Christ had lifted man up and shown him what was good, and that they might describe as bringing man to God and revealing God to man.

### CANON AITKEN

St. Peter's Church, St. Albans : The question, "Do we believe?" had been recently forced upon public attention by a remarkable correspondence in the pages of one of the most prominent of our daily newspapers. They owed a debt of gratitude to that paper, or, rather, to those who were responsible for its management, for the throwing open of its columns to such an important discussion. Nothing could be more disastrous than that men should flatter themselves that they did believe the Christian revelation when, as a matter of fact, they did nothing of the sort. Anything must be better than self-deception in such a matter. The course of this discussion and the careful observation of the facts of the case made the following conclusions abundantly evident : (1) That there was a certain number of persons, not perhaps a very large one, that did not believe in the Christian revelation at all. (2) That there was a much larger class of persons who accepted that revelation only to a very limited extent, and with a large amount of reserve, particularly so far as the statements which involved the supernatural were concerned. Such persons

were disposed to think much more highly of the ethical element in Christianity than of the spiritual. (3) Then there was by far the largest class of all, the representatives of which, however, had probably not added much to the discussion. It consisted of those who still bore the Christian name, chiefly because they happened to have been born in a Christian country. They professed to believe because they had never taken the trouble to question the Christian faith, but it was obvious to all that their belief exerted no sort of influence on their lives that in any way distinguished them from professed unbelievers. It was to this class, as it would seem, that the question, "Do we believe?" was particularly appropriate. (4) There were, no doubt, a good many who really did believe, or had believed, but who were not living in the full and constant exercise of the faith that they professed, and such did probably more than any other class of persons to encourage doubt, because their numerous inconsistencies and their antinomian habit gave great "occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme." (5) There were some (would to God that the number was larger than it was) who really did believe, and showed it by the lives they led, and by the sacrifices that they made. The fact of the existence of this class should give pause to those who were disposed to reject the Christian revelation altogether; while it should confirm the faith of those who belonged to the second class of persons just mentioned. The great fact of missionary enterprise, which was so marked a feature of the religious life of our day, was the best proof that could be given of the fact that many amongst us still did believe, and the further fact that not a few of the volunteers for missionary service had turned their backs on splendid worldly prospects at home to join in

that work gave additional force to the testimony. So long as faith continued to inspire such magnificent enthusiasm, it was absurd to suggest that faith was dying out of the world ; but it was the great and obvious fact of the existence of the third class of persons referred to that had given occasion to this discussion. The preacher concluded by an earnest appeal to his hearers to put to themselves the question of the text, "Do ye now believe?" and to make sure that their faith was not a cold and barren mentalism, but the moral repose of heart and will on the promises and on the Person of God revealed in Christ.

### CANON FLEMING

St. John's Church, Hackney: He could not do better than speak on the subject of Christian belief. Among all the questions to which *The Daily Telegraph* had opened its columns, he thought that none had been more interesting or more profitable than this. But long before *The Daily Telegraph* thought of it—nearly 2,000 years ago—our Lord Jesus Christ Himself put the question, in a rather different form, when He asked, on a memorable occasion, of one who came to Him for help, "Dost thou believe?" The answer, as they knew, was, "Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief" ; and if those he had the privilege of addressing could only make that answer, it was a sufficient answer for their Lord and Master. This great question was really a personal question ; it might be put in this way, "Do I believe on the Son of God?" He hoped that the question would now be settled (if it had not already been settled) once and for ever.



## CANON GORTON

St. Lawrence's Church, Morecambe: Text, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (St. Luke xviii. 8). It was strange to find that this question had been taken out of the pulpit and discussed in *The Daily Telegraph*, arousing such keen and widespread interest. "Oxoniensis" was evidently oblivious of the fact that the Church Congress had met not for the examination of the foundation of the Church, but for building it up. Ignoring this, he asked the question whether those who met had not better first ask, "Do people believe at all?" There was no difficulty in answering that question. No, they did not believe. It was ridiculous to say that England was Christian, but there were Christians in England. Was Parliament Christian? Not at all, but individuals in it might be. Was *The Daily Telegraph* Christian? No, it did not profess to be. Its writers might be influenced by Christianity. "Oxoniensis" went wrong in his failure to recognise the principles of the Sermon on the Mount and placed them opposite the ideals of modern life. Why did he not take the last text of the Sermon, "Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect"? Could he turn round and say they were all hypocrites because they were not perfect? Because "Oxoniensis" did not find a Christian nation he turned round on Christians. As a nation they did not believe—but as individuals. The question which should have been asked was, "Is there individual faith?" The correspondence in *The Daily Telegraph* had taken the form of a great confession, and men under *noms-de-plume* had stepped into the confessional-box and spoken that the world might hear. The interest of the discussion lay in the fact that answers had come from all ranks, anxious to convey to their fellow-men how the faith had touched



them. The teaching of the Church of England had never been to idolise the Bible, but was the interpreter of it. In facing the new condition of things the clergy found themselves between the Devil and the deep sea. If they kept abreast with modern science and dared to believe there was a development of knowledge, and treat the Bible as a mine of gold, with varying deposits of ore in quartz and nuggets, they were denounced as undermining the faith of the faithful. If, on the other hand, they were not gifted with scientific or literary capacities and contented themselves with seeking to aid men in spiritual need only, they were denounced as being fatuous hypocrites who would shut out knowledge. In the ordinary ailments of life they went to the general practitioner, but in cases of grave disease they went to the specialist. So, when in intellectual trouble, they must go to the masters of theology—Westcott, Lightfoot, Liddon, and Gore—and seek relief, not carelessly, but with earnest pains and mental effort, before they condemned the teaching of the Church.

### CANON DUTTON

Preaching before the King and Queen and other members of the Royal Family at Sandringham Church: Text, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." Referring to the correspondence on the question, "Do we believe?" which was appearing day by day in *The Daily Telegraph*, and attracting the attention of people of all classes to the subject, he urged that professing Christians should so order their lives as to show forth before the world the reality of their religion. In elaborating his theme he dwelt upon the importance of ideals. Everybody, he said, whether a soldier, a states-

man, or an artisan, should set before himself an ideal, and if he could not attain to it he should at least live as near to it as he could. He mentioned Marlborough, Bacon, and Buonaparte, not necessarily as men whose examples should be followed, but as men who attained as nearly as possible to the ideals at which they aimed.

### CANON HENSLEY HENSON

St. Margaret's Church, Westminster : Every clergyman now believed in the views expressed by the critics who, forty years ago, delivered opinions which Dr. Pusey denounced as dishonouring to God and fatal to Christianity. Dr. Pusey's attitude of panic was again asserting itself among the few bibliolators who remained. Dealing with the Book of Daniel, Canon Henson said it was written by an unknown Jewish patriot, and the stories it contained could not be regarded as anything but unedifying tales. Their inspiration did not indicate historical accuracy, but formed a vehicle for moral teaching, and he quoted in support of this the opinion of his distinguished predecessor, Dean Farrar. If they continued teaching from the Book of Daniel as if all it contained actually happened, they would be teaching tales indeed, but tales which were not edifying. Let them be honest with the children in that respect.

### CANON DUCKWORTH

Westminster Abbey : There was a great danger in the present day, when man had added so wondrously to his knowledge, of his yielding to the temptation to believe

supremely in himself without regard to any Higher Power. They as a nation were specially prone to that from the feeling of independence which animated them, but man was dependent when he entered the world, and his dependence met him in a hundred ways at every turn of life. From this he argued that the radical defect of present-day stoicism was the deification of the human will.

### CANON BARKER

St. Marylebone Church : Answering the question, "Do we believe?" he said that faith or belief was a necessary part of our nature ; that we were unable to exist, or live, or work, or think without the exercise of faith or belief. True, there was in the present day a restlessness and unwillingness to believe much that our forefathers believed ; doctrines, for instance, which taught that every word or syllable in the Bible was inspired by God and the belief in eternal fire and punishment. These doctrines were not credible now. The universe was not stationary—all things were in a state of evolution and progress. Mankind was not, he maintained, losing its faith in a better world—a brighter future. The kingdom of God was for everybody. We were all brothers in the same human family, we all owed our origin to the same Great Source. Men, he held, did believe in the highest form of Christianity ; they desired to bring mankind more into uniformity with Christ's own life. Because churches were not filled man was not, therefore, losing faith. What was needed to-day was the presentation of religious truth in a form which the human mind could assimilate. The question asked in a great daily paper would lead many to ask where they stood and what was their real faith. When they prayed

did they believe their prayers were heard? and when they asked forgiveness of their sins did they honestly and sincerely believe those sins were forgiven? Their individual belief determined their life and conduct. If they believed in God with all their heart and soul and strength, then they had something to stand upon. God grant that this public discussion might lead to a right decision in the minds of all.

### CANON McCORMICK

St. Luke's Church, West Hampstead : All true religion was personal. When giving expression to their belief in church the words used were "I believe," and each must believe for himself or herself if they were to have the blessings associated with salvation. He remembered a bishop saying that if they believed in every clause in the Apostles' Creed they would be real Christians, and he was right. If they were simple believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, they had the cup of salvation, and they were to get out of that salvation the blessings that were ready for their own souls.

### PREBENDARY WEBB-PEPLOE

Bethnal Green : It was a good sign that public interest was being awakened on the question of belief in God. Science could not account for the phenomenon of life. Lord Kelvin, only the other day, told a party of students that there was yet not even an approach to the discovery of a cell of life in the human body. There was a great mystery, far beyond what man could conceive.

# PREBENDARY SHELFORD

St. Martin-in-the-Fields : In whatever age man had lived, he said, there had been a lack of hope which was a grotesque satire on human life, as had been pointed out in the oldest manuscript existing in the world—a mere fragment of a leaflet which had been translated into English. Men were always hopeless because they despaired ; nevertheless, the hope which beat in the heart of man lived on in the human race, and helped the world to bear its yoke. Therefore, they should not despair, believing that God was working out His own designs by His own methods. If the days in which they lived seemed dark and lowering, he urged them not to despair, not to listen to the voice of the pessimist, but to be of good cheer, to hope on, and to hope ever.

# REV. LORD WILLIAM CECIL

St. Albans Diocesan Conference : It could not be made too clear in this day that religion was a vital living force. The one great mistake the critics of religion made to-day was the ignoring of faith, and such mode of argument would inevitably lead to disaster. The religion of the Bible must be believed because it was divine.

# REV. WILSON CARLILE

(FOUNDER OF THE CHURCH ARMY)

St. Mary-at-Hill, Monument : He took it the consensus of opinion was that nearly all wanted to believe, but did not want to worship. Admiration for the hero,



Christ, was valuable, but the force that moved Him was invaluable and absolutely necessary to make men love (not like) their enemies and restore the real spirit of Paradise to earth. The miracle of thousands of vicious and drunken persons changed to decent citizens and missionaries in the Church Army was not one of the feeblest evidences of the faith.

#### REV. H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

St. Mary's, Bryanston Square, W. : If they were to see some of the letters he could show them, communications from quite poor and not well-educated folk who had read the correspondence in *The Daily Telegraph*, he thought they would be struck very much indeed with the way in which all classes were really desirous of belief. There was no such thing, apparently, in the present day as wilful scepticism, but there was a great amount of bewilderment, and, at the same time, of longing to reach a right solution of theological difficulties. Turning to remedies for want of belief, of faith, he submitted that union amongst Christian people was essential, and pleaded for a closer, homelier, and more brotherly contact with the people—a sympathetically responsive attitude towards inquirers, and the manifestation of every desire to help them in their difficulties. He thought belief was growing, though the dogmatic statements might be less popular. Our day was not one of despair, but of some encouragement and of great call to earnestness in setting forth the Christ.

#### DR. HORTON

Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church, Hampstead :  
If the question were put to him, "Do we believe?"

he should answer, without hesitation, "Yes, we do." Directly we believe we were dismayed at our unbelief and wanted it cured. That was the most complete proof of our faith. Broadly, he should say we did believe, otherwise it would not occur to a popular and widely-circulated paper to raise the question, as it would not be profitable to open its columns for the discussion. He would adduce reasons in support of his statement. At the present time there were two men in England who stood in the front rank of science, whose names were world-known, and whose contributions to scientific progress were universally admitted—he referred to Lord Kelvin and Sir Oliver Lodge. Those leaders of British science both believed, and both were able, and even willing, to give the strongest reasons—scientific reasons—for their faith. A quarter of a century ago Huxley and Tyndall were the most famous men in the scientific world. The change was almost incalculable. Then Science asserted that matter explained and originated everything. But to-day Science had begun to investigate matter, and the conclusion was that matter, so far from explaining everything, needed explanation itself. Instead of the matter being put in the place of God, it was rapidly becoming the most powerful argument for God. Depend upon it, we were just on the eve of one of those great revolutions of thought which constituted the beginning of faith ; and in a few years men would be as impatient of the apostles of unbelief as they had been sometimes impatient of the apostles of faith. One practical reason for believing that we did believe was the vastly improved demeanour of the population. An extraordinary change was noticeable in the whole tone and feeling of average people. The inhabitants of London, with all their faults, were considerate to one another, gentle, courteous, and charitable. Take the man in the

street ; he might be brusque in manner, but he was tender at heart. Assuredly the gentleness of Christ had entered into our modern world, and the millions of London were coming under its spell.

### REV. R. J. CAMPBELL

City Temple : Some one had handed to him just before he entered the pulpit a copy of that morning's *Daily Telegraph*, in which was an article entitled "Do we believe?" Some of them who were familiar with his way of teaching had heard that question asked in that pulpit. "Do we believe?" The Sermon on the Mount—illustrated as it was by Christ's life—contained a series of ideals. Here were some : The ideal of poverty. The writer of the letter must not forget that Christ was not poor now. As he had taught from that pulpit before, in almost the very words of this writer, a man believed precisely that to which he adjusted his life. If the life had nothing to do with what the lip said, then they might hold in all honesty an opinion and call it a creed, but it had no right to that moral qualitative which was implied in faith. "You and I," Mr. Campbell added, "are now facing a great mystery. Do any of you really believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins? What difference does it make in your life? I will tell you what it ought to do sooner or later ; it is certain to nail you upon your cross. You can begin just at whatever angle of the truth you like, you will find before you have gone very far that you who would be a redeemer must be a crucified one, too. You may be a rich man and yet have to go through it, and some person may write to a paper and say what he thinks about your conformity to the ideal. No one can possibly know but yourself how you

are living it. You need not be sad about it, either ; sadness is not the conspicuous quality in the demeanour of Christ. His was a sublime, but not a sombre triumph when He went to Calvary."

REV. C. SILVESTER HORNE

Whitefield's Church, Tottenham-court Road : Text, St. Luke vi. 46, "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" The natural sequence to "Do we believe?" was to be found in a plain and straightforward answer to the question, "Do we obey?" It was not "Do we believe?" but "Have we fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited the sick?" Was he not right in asserting scepticism was being produced and infidelity manufactured because of the artificiality and insincerity of Christians? Practice and profession did not necessarily go together. In the early Christian days it was never supposed that if a man bowed formally in the creed in Church he could go and live the giddy life of the gamester or the gossip. If they only got back to the simple and sincere life they could drum infidelity out of the land. Unpopularity was hard to stand, but it made the man. There was too much of the so-called benevolent neutrality. They might be sure they would not be judged by their belief, but by what they had done to make the world happier. It was really a wonder Christianity had survived the professions of its professors. Social ostracism was now employed to make a man ashamed of the faith of his fathers. Lip profession with Jesus was nothing ; life obedience was everything. The only Bible the world read was the life of the Christian. Show the world a real life of true holiness and the scoffer was dumb. "Believe and obey" should be their motto ; but if they believed



without obedience they helped to create sceptics by the thousands. No one could look on the state of Society and say the Church had done its duty. If the Church had obeyed it would have been better than professing its beliefs or chanting its creed. God grant that in the last day they might stand the final test, and say, "Thou didst not only teach me to believe, but also to obey."

### DR. GUINNESS ROGERS

Congregational Church, Muswell Hill: He was not sure that religion did not gain by the open antagonism which was now so prevalent, and he preferred it to the indifferent neutrality of a few years ago. Many people seemed to think that religious belief was the putting on of something, or a choice, like the choice of a club or a political party, something, in fact, assumed like an outward garment. An American poet had beautifully expressed a conception of the meaning of religion as "A Sacramental liturgy—the joy of doing good." But it was more than that. Religion was something more than a liturgy. It was notable that the men of whom our Lord Jesus Christ expressed the strongest condemnation, against whom His denunciations were directed, were the so-called religious Pharisees. They were the actors only of a religious part, and they did that to perfection. Religious belief was not a cold correctness. The Pharisee was coldly correct—he observed every letter of the law; yet Christ denounced him as a hypocrite, or actor, as the word meant in those days. Belief was not a form; it was a force—a living power; neither was religion the mere acceptance of a creed. An American journalist—a very brilliant man in his profession, very intellectual—came to him and confessed he had surrendered himself to the



service of Christ, but asked, "How can I feel I believe?" His answer was, "Have you believed so much as to surrender your will to God?" The belief that held him (the preacher) was strong and living. To him the faith was not an opinion; it was a confession—nay, it was more, it was a conviction blossoming into an affection, fused into the fire of passion till it became a passion itself. The creed they held was the one that had given the world the reformers, the missionaries, and the martyrs. The root of the whole matter was the love of God, showing itself in the willingness to yield the whole will in obedience to the dictates of the Father, the giving of the whole self to God, anxious to obey in His service.

#### DR. CLIFFORD

Westbourne Park Chapel: If they looked up the evidence which came to them from the Churches of all sorts they got an answer which might, perhaps, be expressed in this way: There are in the Churches hundreds of thousands who do not believe the creeds of the Churches, but who nevertheless believe in Jesus Christ, seek His law, and strive to do it, and are sure of His revelation of mercy from God and of a home everlasting. There are hundreds of thousands of whom this might be said: They are really verifying their belief by their behaviour, and vindicating their trust by their self-sacrifice and their devotion. But the Churches were not all. The question, "Do we believe?" ought to carry them outside the Churches. The Church was simply an institution created by Christianity. Christianity itself was a spirit formative of organisations, of institutions, but there was a great deal of Christianity that never got into the institutional shape. It was in the hearts of men, it

moved in individuals, it affected them, their homes, their activities, in the city, in the State, but still it did not get into any organic, any institutional form. He asked his congregation to carry home with them these lessons—(1) Let them insist upon sincerity ; (2) keep up the emphasis of Jesus Christ on conduct ; (3) cease altogether censuring unbelief when unbelief is simply dissent from theological creeds or Church theories ; (4) remember that faith in the New Testament is always a spirit and not the acceptance of a proposition ; (5) learn from this discussion that the best contribution we as individuals can make to the home, to the nation, is by being like unto Jesus Christ.

REV. J. WILSON

(PRESIDENT OF THE BAPTIST UNION)

Woolwich Tabernacle : The question came home to them, Did they believe ? Were they living in a time of spiritual decline ? He thought there had been a change in belief, in what they believed. Something had been dropped out, something salutary. It was no longer the earnest cry of Tennyson for "the larger hope," but the dogmatic assurance that all souls would ultimately reach Heaven. It was the change in the things believed that had led to a weakening of faith ; but he did not believe that this would last. Man could not live upon negations. Religion was indestructible, and it was necessary to all. People were not sufficient of themselves. The inconsistencies of Christians were referred to very fully in *The Daily Telegraph*. It might be that such censure was necessary in order to lead those who professed the name of Christ to examine themselves, whether they were living so as

to lead men to accept the Gospel or not; but he did not accept the verdict of the worldling upon the Christian man. If any impartial person would examine the lives of a hundred men who were known as believers, who lived and walked with God, he would be astonished, not at the unlikeness, but at the likeness to Jesus Christ. The cause of Christianity did not rest upon the failures of Christians. He was not besmirched by their inconsistencies. He stood before them as the revealer of God, the ideal for their life. One writer said that he might accept the worldly ideal as one that he might try to follow, but the Christian ideal was too high for him. What a testimony—that the highest ideal was that of Jesus Christ! They admitted that the standard was beyond them, but the Gospel was revealed to meet man's need. They turned to Christ, moreover, as the Saviour from sin, as the vanquisher of death, the one authority who could speak concerning the life to come.

#### DR. Z. T. DOWEN

Wynne Road Baptist Church, Brixton: What did Christ mean by believing? Two things, possibly others, were vital. They must accept His own personal divinity, and then, by logical sequence, His loving and redeeming powers. What was the answer to the question, "Do we believe" to-day? Speaking for himself, he made no reserve in giving an emphatic "Yes" to the question. But was there more faith, or less, than in the past? He believed distinctly more; and for three reasons. First, the cult of science was more Christians. Some of them were old enough to remember the age and reign of Darwin, Huxley, and Tyndall, and the eager and shallow Agnosticism of that time. To-day those were

spent forces, extinct volcanoes, no longer dreaded, not much respected, and rarely quoted. But in their place they had Kelvin, Lodge, Thompson, and others, who, with larger vision and fuller knowledge, were believing men. Their literature, moreover, was brightened and sweetened by a strong element of faith. One did not need to worship at the shrine of Marie Corelli, Hall Caine, or Mrs. Humphry Ward ; but one must recognise that these, with many others he could name, were believers in God and in Jesus Christ, whom He had sent. Our literature, he admitted, left much to be desired, but on the whole it was believing and Christian. The fact that a great London daily opened its columns in this way was a tacit admission of the existence and power of faith.

#### REV. THOMAS SPURGEON

Queen's Hall, Wimbledon : Lately a great deal had been written and said upon the question of " Do we believe ? " Recently he was told an interesting story in which his revered father, Mr. Charles Spurgeon, was a factor. A man said to his father, " Really, I like you, Mr. Spurgeon, but I cannot get on with you. The trouble is that when I and my friends come to your Tabernacle we hear the Gospel, and nothing but the Gospel, whereas if we go and hear this or that doctor or divine we get something else beside the Gospel." And that really was the fault. There were many preachers who failed to preach the Gospel, and the Gospel only, as it was to be found in the Bible. There were many teachers who swerved and missed the mark. There were those professing to preach Christ who made a boast of their unbelief in certain portions of the Word of God, and who delivered to the people a message in which they themselves had no belief. There

were those whose main object seemed to be analysing, instead of idolising, the Bible, and even analysed it in an evil sense. The Bible was not the work of man alone, but was the inspired Word of God.

## REV. SYLVESTER WHITEHEAD

(PRESIDENT OF THE WESLEYAN CONFERENCE)

Bolton : It was rather amusing to read some of the letters on the subject of "Do we believe?" and it was rather painful to read others, but at the same time there were many which showed that there was a great deal of real conviction. He noticed that the letters of those who had lost their faith were very sad as compared with the joy of those who believed. Some looked on life as a tragedy and a grand catastrophe. That was not their view of life as believers. They believed life could be set to a finer issue and made the preparation of the life that was cloudless, sinless, sorrowless, and everlasting. If a man believed in God, how dare he disregard His authority, and how dare he regard life as a tragedy and a mistake? It would relieve much of their troubles, soothe many of their sorrows, and solve many of their problems if they would only have strength and faith in God.

## DR. J. MONRO GIBSON

St. John's Wood Presbyterian Church : The correspondence indicated that a great many people, who perhaps said very little about the subject in their conversation, felt in their heart of hearts that this was the question of questions both for the life we knew and any life there might be to come hereafter. So far as he had heard, the correspondence had been hailed with



satisfaction. That was a marked sign of the times. He was quite sure that if there had been such freedom shown in a popular discussion on this subject forty years ago there would have been very much alarm and no little condemnation, but this was not evident now. Christian people had gladly accepted this free and frank discussion. He certainly agreed that the total result would be good. The most formidable foe to the Gospel of Christ was indifference. What a dead calm was to a sailing vessel deadly indifference was to the Gospel ship. His earnest hope and prayer was that this popular discussion of the great themes of life and eternity might set many people thinking who had settled down into a dead and settled calm. He denied for most of his ministerial brethren that they did not welcome this discussion ; they even forgave the hard things said of them. Some of the letters spoke of ministers withholding help from people in their doubts and difficulties, but he should like to know whether any of the writers had given any minister any opportunity of helping them. Personally, he gladly helped inquirers all he could. Many of the correspondents said the Sermon on the Mount was enough for them. Well, let them seek to live up to it. The most paramount call in the Sermon was the call to prayer. If they tried to live up to the Sermon on the Mount they would feel the need of the same Christ who had told them what to do to show them how to do it.

### REV. J. CHRISTIE

(EX-MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF  
ENGLAND)

Carlisle : The interest in the question, " Do we believe?" had been shown by the great length of the correspondence,

which he regarded as a healthy sign. While, as might be expected, great differences of opinion were expressed, still, on the balance, it decidedly inclined to prove that there was faith on the earth, and that of such description as was duly associated with evangelical religion. That many were all at sea, without compass or rudder so far as faith went, and were thus void of belief, he mournfully accepted as a fact, and he also had a suspicion that the faith of many was a singularly unformed quantity. But, all the same, there was overwhelming proof that a robust and living faith held the field.

#### DR. HUGH FALCONER

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Notting Hill : His answer to the question "Do we believe?" was "Yes, but far too timidly." People's faith lacked the note of assurance and victory which appealed to men so powerfully in the Apostolic age. Some good people thought it a sign of humility to doubt the reality of God's forgiving love, and imagined that no one could have assurance of pardon before the Day of Judgment. Others were in bondage to the dread of death; others were so feeble-minded as to fancy that arbitrary assumptions and reckless assertions made in the name of science or of Biblical criticism had unsettled the foundations of Christian faith. Very many were restrained from living a life of spontaneous, simple-hearted Christian beneficence by mere dread of their neighbours, by a slavish social respect, and deference to conventional customs and maxims. They were spell-bound by the fear of man, as the wedding guest in Coleridge's poem was held captive by the glittering eye of the Ancient Mariner. Our age was nervous, at times even

hysterical, and it was not faith that was lacking so much as the courage of faith.

#### REV. B. BELL AT PAU

Presbyterian Church, Pau, France : A large amount of unbelief and uncertainty was shown to exist in Christian England by the correspondence in *The Daily Telegraph* during the last two months. That it should be necessary to ask the question, "Do we believe?" in England at this time of day, after sixteen centuries of the preaching of the Gospel there, was sad enough. If ever there was a land that owed all its greatness to Christianity it was ours. For them who called themselves Christians, the more needful question probably was, "How and why do we believe?" And many, very many, of the writers in *The Daily Telegraph* had given admirable answers to that question. "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," well said the Westminster Assembly's Catechism, "is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel." It was pleasing to note how many writers in this correspondence brought out in their own words that great catholic truth about true faith.

#### FATHER VAUGHAN

Preaching at Wimbledon : He was asked the question "Do we believe?" and he said, Thank God, there were to-day perhaps a larger sum of people who believed than at any other time in the history of the world, and there were many millions whose faith to-day was energising in love. Thank God, there were brethren of Christ to-day who not merely were proud to rally round His banner,

but who were ready to go forth and work for Him, who came up in unconditional surrender, cap in hand, ready to fetch and carry, ready, thank God ! to play the part of His errand-boys. To-day they were told that there were such colossal powers reared against the banner of the faith that it was almost impossible not to go under. He did not think much of the faith of those who said that, for if they had a little more faith they could walk even like Peter upon the most treacherous sea of trouble, Christ being ahead. The difficulties to-day were not to be compared with the difficulties Peter and James and the rest of Christ's followers had to encounter. He and his brethren whom he was addressing were not afraid of the faith. They knew there was one thing that had overcome the world—their faith—and they had it on authority better than that of any writer in *The Daily Telegraph* ; they had it on the word of Him who was their Captain King, He who said, not "Forward," but "Follow, follow Me." The difficulty, he was told that morning, was "How could one believe what one could not understand ?" Well, if he only believed what he understood he would have to put the shutters up, and that was the case with all of them. But they all knew One they could believe—Jesus. If there was a somewhat large percentage of those who did not believe, whose fault was it ? Perhaps, to some extent, the fault of Catholics for not bringing their practice more on a level with their professions.

### BISHOP HENRY

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Pro-Cathedral, Belfast :  
Faith was the foundation of belief. Faith was not only necessary in spiritual affairs, but also in temporal. Many of God's laws and acts were beyond the range of human



understanding, so faith stepped in and supplied the missing link. In the same way Christians knew the human destiny by faith. Great philosophers, such as Aristotle and Plato, notwithstanding their intellectual capacity and research, were unable to say what man's destiny was, but faith supplied the necessary information. Sceptics asked how they were to distinguish the Word of God from the word of man. God answered that question when He said to His apostles, "Go ye and teach all nations," and again when He said, "I will be with you always, even to the consummation of the world," thus proving that the command was not only given to the apostles but to their successors. They could not, however, live by faith alone. It was necessary to do something more than merely read over God's commandments; they must be carefully studied and lived up to.

#### DR. HERMANN GOLLANCZ

(PROFESSOR OF HEBREW, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON)

Bayswater Synagogue: While some writers have answered the inquiry "Do we believe?" in a very pessimistic spirit, others have replied full of hope and optimism. But the one main truth has resulted from the inquiry, and this cannot be denied or minimised. It is this: The great difference in the world between belief and practice; the inability or unwillingness to rise to the ideals which religion places before the worshipper. Our views or beliefs regarding metaphysical questions, for example, Heaven and Hell, to which reference is made, matter very little, for the simple reason that, as far as the truth is concerned, the wise man is no nearer positive knowledge than the foolish, and we shall never in the



mortal state get any nearer the truth on such points. As regards miracles, too, there will always exist diversity of opinion among men dependent upon the difference of training, education, and environment. But in the end speaking broadly, it matters very much more how we live than what we believe. The original writer, "Oxoniensis," who started the discussion, put this point admirably when he remarked: "A religion must necessarily issue in morality. Whether we take it that religion is morals touched with emotion, or morals religion reduced to practice—in either case there must be some tenets or principles of a practical kind to guide us in the difficult thoroughfares of life." And he then draws two contrasting pictures, the one showing life as it should be, the other representing modern life as it is. On the one hand, the ideals of poverty, humility, and absence of revenge, the ideals of self-sacrifice, innocence, and sexual purity, in thought as well as in action. And our interrogator places over against this picture the other, truly doleful in reality, the ideal of wealth, with its ostentation, smartness, and notoriety; the ideals of self-assertion, of trampling on others, and rising at their expense; the ideals of selfishness, personal enjoyment, and fashionable impurity. Which of these two creeds, he rightly and pertinently asks, do we believe? We cannot believe both. They are absolutely antithetical and contradictory. Not one whit too scathing is the implied indictment launched forth upon the world to-day by the author of this letter; who, to use his own words, is "not a preacher, nor a prophet—only an observer of life, . . . speaking of the vast majority, the men and women of the world; of ourselves, in short, as an average mass." I have not hesitated to reproduce the expressions used to represent some portion of the ideal of the higher life, the truly religious life, because, as some of

you will know, they happen to be contained in a book which we Jews do not recognise ; for not only in spirit, but to the very letter, these declarations, if they belong to any "ism," belong to, being derived from, Judaism. And here I would join issue with one who has taken part in the discussion—no less a one than the Bishop of London, who, doubtless true to his convictions and loyal to his position, is ever ready to refer the civilising influence which has made itself felt in the world during past ages to the Gospel of the Founder of Christianity, and wilfully to ignore the claims of Judaism in this respect. By the mathematical process of substitution, might I not, speaking on behalf of the faith to which I belong, with equal, if not greater right, use his very words, substituting "Judaism" for "Christianity" and the "Bible" for the "Gospel"? Not the Gospel exclusively, but the Bible originally, has silently and gradually brought about a revolution in man's morals ; not Christianity *par excellence*, but Judaism from the earliest times. And yet, if we look at the world as a whole, not separated by a division of tongues, not divided off, alas ! by the barriers of religious systems, must we not lament that the practice of morality and virtue falls far short of the ideals of morality and virtue which have been placed before mankind by the various faiths which have risen up in the world, all having so much in common as regards the ethical portion of these faiths—the rules for the proper conduct of life? Let us continue to be true to the teachings of our faith, which inculcates the spirit of humility and self-sacrifice, the love of innocence and purity, the desire to bear with others' weaknesses, and to be quick to pardon, to act justly, and to show kindness to those in need, and to evince sympathy with the sick and suffering ones of earth.

## REV. S. A. ADLER

Hammersmith and West Kensington Synagogue : The burning question of the day was, "Do we believe?" Was the profession of faith more than mere lip-service? Did it come from the heart as well as from the mouth? Or else, why should there be so great a gap between faith and practice, between life and creed? Did they "believe with a perfect faith" the Jewish creeds as codified by Maimonides? Did they live their lives in the realised presence of God and beneath the shadow of a Future Existence, counting this world but a preparation for Eternal Life? And yet he held that they did believe, but that modern life and modern conditions hid from them their God and dimmed their eyes of Faith. Their duty in the present crises of Doubt and Faith, in the midst of these years of indifferentism and unrest, was clear and unmistakable—theirs must ever be the spirit of humility and the spirit of love. Pride was atheism, the Rabbis taught. Only the pure in heart and the humble of spirit would see Him.

"Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,  
A humble and a contrite heart.  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget! Amen."

## PASTEUR L. DEGREMONT

Before French people in Bloomsbury Hall : He wanted to speak on the belief of the country whose hospitality so many of his compatriots enjoyed. England was essentially a country that believed. Judging from the extracts from sermons published in *The Daily Telegraph*,

it was very clear that the vast majority of the people believed, but, at the same time, there were a great number who had no belief at all. There was also the great question, "What do we believe?" Before people could answer it was necessary for them to think very seriously. Many who had answered it had completely lost sight of the basis of the Christian religion. There was one way, and only one way, of answering, and that was by studying and embracing the Gospel. It was not necessary for all to have precisely the same doctrines. Just because two men did not hold exactly the same opinions it was not right to say that one did not believe. Some people had said that they did not believe because they could not understand. Although one could not understand everything in the Bible, it was quite possible to believe, because there was a very great portion of the Bible which one could understand. The greater the belief the easier it was to understand, especially when one remembered the vast difference between human and Divine intelligence.

#### REV. J. MILNE

Scottish Church, Holloway : It was the struggle after righteousness, both in the individual and national life, that made good citizenship and betokened a healthy spiritual life. The much-urged question, "Do we believe?" might be treated metaphysically, psychologically, theologically. It might be regarded in so many aspects as to bewilder the earnest seeker after truth, but the answer to the question of belief, for all practical purposes, was found in the life itself. It was the criterion whereby men might know whether they believed and what they believed. That, accordingly, a shaking among

the dry bones of the creeds was required, and might soon be expected, was proved by the national life of to-day. Among a so-called Christian people there was the undue acquisition of wealth by the individual, while multitudes lived in poverty. The land was held by comparatively few, while thousands were overcrowded in the cities. The drink traffic, very much by reason of the present pernicious licensing system, wrought moral wrong, and through its trade organisation greatly controlled political action. The House of Commons was a misnomer. Never would the people be really represented there until, through payment of members, as found already in most Colonial legislatures, it was open to those who, apart from wealth, had character and ability to enter it. An unprejudiced observer looking upon our profession and our life as a nation might well ask, "Do we believe?"

### MR. F. G. JANNAWAY

(LEADER, BRIXTON CHRISTADELPHIANS)

Brixton Hall: "Do we believe?" was the question of the hour. No man worthy of the name said there was no God—only a fool. Even Bradlaugh did not say there was no God. That there was a God was to be proved in many ways. True, the Bible did not prove that there was a God; it took it for granted that the people would recognise that there was a God. All around them was evidence of God. To-day the evolution theory was losing ground. Men must be judged by their actions, not words, when it was sought to discover whether they believed. The actions of many proved that they could not believe. Whilst votaries of pleasure paid no heed to the Bible, there were many of the clergy who were ignorant of the Bible. The univer-



sities were to blame, and the authorities there admitted that the Bible was not taught as it should be. In view of the criticism of the Bible, and the undermining of the foundations of Christianity, it was not to be wondered at that there was need to ask if the people believed. It was unfortunate that nine out of every ten clergymen did not enter the Church because they felt inspired, but because their parents had willed that they should become clergymen.

### DR. WASHINGTON SULLIVAN

#### (ETHICAL RELIGION SOCIETY)

Steinway Hall: Subject, "Do We believe?—The Ethical Answer." The answers to the question "Do we believe?" so far as he had read them, appeared to be as variegated as the theologies which they represented. The writer of the opening letter appeared to have accurately grasped the situation, and he was what the Roman Catholic Church would describe as a devil's advocate. He did not spare the dark shade as he filled in his picture of contemporary religious life in England, and he showed clearly, like the thoughtful man he evidently was, that it was not a question of the individual, but that it was the fundamental attitude of the Christian faith towards modern society that was being called into question, that was being, indeed, practically repudiated. One thing was certain: if what we were told was true, that the old ideals were simply unbelievable, and that practically all educated people had abandoned them; if they had lost those ideals and had no others in their place, then those people—and by so much the nation—were doomed, because a man and a nation could not live without that which we called ideals. Unless

there was something unseen, an attempt to realise something higher than anything in our material experience, the man was doomed. A man must have religion, in the shape of ideals which uplifted and stimulated him, whether it took the form of knowledge, scientific research, patriotism, education, or a devotion to the family life—something which gave to the idea of life the pursuit of some good purpose. This was to be found in the Ethical religion as in no other, for it was based on the highest conviction, that of experience, which taught them to believe in the moral obligation and in the eternal dissension between right and wrong.

### SIR OLIVER LODGE

(PRINCIPAL OF BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY)

Birkbeck College : I am very much impressed with the power and responsibility of the human race, and with the management of this planet, which seems to be given to it, so that things will not improve unless we improve. I believe in Divine guidance, but I believe in a Deity acting by agents, and that when He takes all this trouble through millions of years to evolve a human race with conscience and free will and power of guidance, He will practically leave it to them to decide what their future is to be.

### VISCOUNT GAGE

English Church Union, Lewes : They must admit that there was an urgent necessity for upholding and defending the Catholic faith. The power of the Creator over His own creation was questioned, and even some priests had openly disavowed the Resurrection of our blessed Lord. These attacks on the foundations of the Christian faith

were painful, and he was glad to see that the bishops had taken a firm stand. The Bishop of London had spoken strongly, but not too strongly, on the matter, and had expressed his intention of refusing to ordain as priests those who were not true to the faith they professed to believe.

### SIR DOUGLAS FOX

Lecture Hall, North Wimbledon, as chairman at the annual meeting of the local branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society : He had heard this year at several meetings he had attended complaints made by earnest workers in the cause of Christ of the indifference that existed, even amongst ministers, with respect to the Word of God. He heard one chairman complain very much that the old system of taking one's Bible to church to follow the lessons and look up the text was dying out ; and it was painfully evident that the habit of referring to the Bible in public was becoming very much in abeyance. He thought also there was a tendency to shorten, and even to diminish, the occasions of family worship, and if they were going to do their work for God properly they must try and reduce that tendency and endeavour to have the Word of God written very deeply upon their hearts. They had been a good deal stirred lately because they were told that they did not believe in the Bible ; but still, there were a great many of them who thought there was still belief in the Bible, in spite of all that had been said and written. It seemed to him that those who made the assertion that there was not belief in the Bible incurred very great responsibility by what they did say. If a man was professing unbelief, he might say some hard things about God's

Word ; and they felt sorry for him ; but it did not affect them much. But when those who ought to be their leaders in Christ's work, and held high positions, either in the Church of England or in the Nonconformist Churches, began to tell them that a great deal in the Bible, although very beautiful, was at the same time mythical, and that there was in it a great deal that people with their twentieth-century ideas could not believe, then the matter bore a very serious and sad aspect indeed. There was not the slightest doubt that nowadays they held the Word of God in too light estimation. They were told that the tenth chapter of the Book of Genesis was mythical, and that Eve, Cain, Abel, and Noah were myths ; and yet it was strange that frequent reference was made to all in the New as well as in the Old Testament. Such statements were to his mind a call to Christians to stand up for the truth, and not to be led away by assertions made to the contrary. During his life he had been brought much into contact with scientists, and he said, without fear of contradiction, that a large majority of scientific men were believers in the Bible. Some of them, after a season of struggle and doubt, had come out right bravely on the Lord's side. The more they believed in the Bible the stronger would be their faith, and the more practical would be their work for God and the Saviour.

## LORD KINNAIRD

Exeter Hall, presiding at meeting in connection with the Jubilee Commemoration of the Bible Lands Missions Aid Society : They had lately been given, from an unexpected quarter, a very interesting series of sermons, and he should



think it most likely that *The Daily Telegraph* correspondence had reached a large number of people who did not frequent churches and chapels very much. The sum and total of it was that it had raised the question, "Do we believe?" and he trusted that all of them would feel that they needed to be asked that question, whether they did practically believe in carrying out the command of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Their society had enabled them to set up the banner of a united testimony in Mohammedan countries, showing the natives that there were points upon which Christians could agree. He did not know whether in America they were wiser, but English people delighted in a special fund, and if it had something to do with orphans or feeding somebody Britishers responded nobly. A famine or a massacre specially appealed to them, and they at once gave their pounds, whereas, if they were asked to support any religious object, the answer proportionally was in farthings. He did not wish to speak evil of his neighbours, but, speaking generally, and judging from the extent of their sacrifices, he should say as a nation they were absolutely Agnostics and unbelievers.

#### MR. W. HAYES FISHER, M.P.

Sale of work, St. Matthew's Church, Fulham : Let them take away St. Matthew's Church, take away the vicarage, take away the vicar and his staff, and those ladies he saw around him, and he asked any believer or unbeliever would life in the parish of St. Matthew's be brighter or duller? Would the Christians grow up stronger or weaker in that neighbourhood? Would they be better or worse? He was of the opinion that people who answered those



questions would say that Church work should be a good, beneficent, and light-giving influence. The question "Do we believe?" was asked when he (Mr. Fisher) was an undergraduate at Oxford. Dr. Jowett was once asked by an undergraduate, "What do you think of God?" "It matters very little indeed what I think of God, but it matters what God thinks of me," was the answer to the interrogation, and that was the very way they ought to think. It became a case of organisation with them to teach "our duty towards God and our neighbour," which ought to be supported by all Christian people.

#### MR. C. E. TRITTON, M.P.

Parochial Hall, Brixton : He trusted that all in that room did believe that Christ died for them, and that they believed in the glorious Gospel of Christ, who came down from Heaven to refresh and save and cheer this weary world. But for that, life would be a meaningless thing of chance to thousands. If they wanted to show the world that they did believe it must be by deeds, not words. They must show that they were not ashamed of Christ, that dear Friend on whom their hopes of Heaven depended, and that they felt it their greatest privilege to work and labour for Him, who had done so much for them.

#### MR. WILL CROOKS, M.P.

Anniversary meeting of East Cliff Congregational Church, Bournemouth : Of course they believed. Great writers told them that Christianity was played out, and other great writers told them that it was not. But it was only those with a great imagination that would have them believe

that Christianity was played out. Whether they were in chapel or out of chapel, whether they lived in slums or in fine palaces, they had frequently, when they were alone, to turn and ask for strength to stand up against temptation. To whom did they appeal in their silence, and sometimes in their sorrow? He knew that if even the man who took the trouble to write them down would take the pains to go into some of the vilest slums in this England of ours and say that "So-and-So was for the abolition of the Bible in schools altogether," the answer he would receive would be, "He is not the man for me. Of course, if I ain't up to much myself, I do want the children to 'ave a chance." What did that mean? It meant that down in the heart of the rough-hewn stone there was a feeling somewhere of an infinite pity, to whom he owed allegiance. How was it that a man when almost beyond himself with despair had ten minutes with his Maker, and then came out a better man? Where did the comfort come from? How was it that they were able to stand up against all the ills that were inflicted upon them? How was it a passive resister enjoyed himself in prison? He did not even seem ashamed of being called a felon—the very name ceased to have an effect upon him, because he believed that he was doing the right thing.

## A GENERAL REPLY

BY "OXONIENSIS"

You have been good enough to ask me to contribute a final letter to the correspondence on "Do we believe?" Although I feel a natural reluctance in inflicting any further reflections of mine on your readers, I have also a certain pleasure in complying with your request, for reasons which can be easily understood. In this matter I suspect that both you and I are in the position indicated in Emerson's well-known lines. In starting this correspondence we have both "builded better than we knew." You, perhaps, did not imagine, I certainly did not, that the arguments and considerations which you allowed me to suggest in my first letter would produce so deep an effect on the community, and lead to so stupendous an amount of controversy. The truth, of course, is that the public was ready and eager for such an opportunity as you gave them, and that the subject, obviously important to all thoughtful men and women, enjoyed a rare advantage both in the time and in the place in which it was promulgated. The word had to be spoken. The seed had to be sown. Whose ever might have been the voice which uttered it, or the hand which cast it in the furrows, the result, as we now know, would have produced the same reverberant echoes, yielded the same abundant harvest.

Of the criticisms, friendly or otherwise, which have been showered on "Oxonensis" I assuredly do not complain. It is natural that some of my words should have been interpreted in other senses than I intended, and that the controversy should have ranged over a far wider field than that originally marked out in my letter. Of course, it is the vast amount of ground covered by the correspondence which has made it so interesting and so noteworthy. But perhaps, for this very reason, you will allow me to recall some of the points to which I drew attention, because, to my mind at least, very valuable, as well as unexpected, light has been thrown upon them in the course of a discussion which has never been frivolous, and sometimes has touched exceedingly high levels of religious and reverential debate. If I desired a categorical answer to my question, "Do we believe?" it has come with remarkable fulness and variety. A large majority of your correspondents have asseverated their belief with an energy which must have surprised the Laodicean apathy of worldly souls, and astonished even the official optimism of the defenders of the Christian faith. The reasons urged for belief have been picturesquely diverse. Of the fact of the belief itself there can be no doubt. I should imagine that, so far as this correspondence reflects the mind of the English people, the believers must be ten and twelve times as numerous as the doubters. And this, too, is an age which has evidently too rashly been styled a sceptical one!

I asked the original question, it will be remembered, both on speculative and on practical grounds. A belief in a future world forms part of the Christian faith, and I ventured to inquire whether the average mass of mankind so conduct their lives as to show that they accept the doctrines of Heaven and Hell. Perhaps I put the matter

a little too bluntly. Most religions contain a definite view of another world, which is held up before us either in the shape of a reward or a punishment. A believing Moham-medan is a Fatalist, because, whatever may happen to him in this mortal sphere, or whatever form of cruel death may await him, he is sure of a happy immortality. Some of your correspondents have supposed that I was debasing the ideal of good for good's sake by even suggesting that men and women were virtuous because of a future reward for their morality. That was not precisely the point which I was desirous of making. I was not thinking of any bribe offered to the virtuous or threat displayed before the eyes of the wicked. But surely it is a fact that a good many religions, and the Christian religion in particular, regard this life as a preparation for another existence, and estimate acts, intentions, motives not by their immediate, but by their future results. So far as my original question is concerned, I maintain that no one who looks at existing conditions can fail to observe that the majority of men, so far from thinking of another world, are quite content to limit their ambitions and desires to the present. Probably even the official teachers of religion have somewhat shifted their ground in reference to this matter. I am told that clergymen preach a good deal more of the duties of our mortal sphere and our everyday obligations to our neighbours, of the tasks which a human being in his threescore years and ten has to accomplish, than their predecessors did half a century ago. In my youth the topics of most sermons were the happy condition of the blessed, the miserable condition of the damned, the constant asseveration that this world was a vale of tears. If the prospect is now changed, if by tacit consent we have put away from our thoughts the possibility of another sphere of existence, the reason is



probably not so much connected with the Christian religion as with the progress of rationalism and the dictates of philosophic moralists. Or perhaps it would be true to say that a good many moral teachers, Socrates, Buddha, and even Christ, often show themselves anxious to repress speculations about the future, in order that the duties of the present may be properly discharged. The gain is doubtless great for the ordinary morality, but I would venture to suggest that the features of a religious creed which is supposed to preach "other-worldliness" are also thereby sensibly metamorphosed.

The second argument in my original letter dealt with a purely practical issue. By common consent the Sermon on the Mount is taken as a sort of summary of Christian ethical doctrine. What I made bold to ask was whether the principles laid down in the Sermon on the Mount were not in direct and violent contradiction with the principles on which we conduct our daily lives. To this, I confess, I have not received any satisfactory answer. Of course, every one is aware that there are a number of people simply and sincerely religious who have never accepted the maxim of worldly success, and who live their quiet, devout lives undisturbed by the stress and passion of the great world around them. But the majority of us who have in whatever sense to live in the world are swayed, consciously or unconsciously, by purely mundane principles. We do not like to be "put upon"; yet the Scripture tells us to turn the other cheek. We believe in self-assertion, in the virtue of what is called "push." If we do not look after ourselves, no one else, we are assured, is going to be at the trouble of caring for our interests. The worst of all faults is to be poor. A man of the world is one who temporises over questions of morals so long as they do not offend the dictates of a highly artificial code of honour.

Now, nothing is clearer than the contrast which all this indicates with the principles laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. Virtues like humility, purity, innocence, simplicity of life and demeanour, poverty, are distinctly recommended, or, I should rather say, are established as the best means of securing the blessing of Heaven. It is no good asserting that the principles of the Sermon on the Mount are merely ideals, for even ideals must bear some relation to the facts of life. If they are utterly divorced from the world as we know it, they can neither inflame nor inspire eager and emotional souls. So that we are involved in the following quandary : either these precepts of the Christian faith are and always have been out of all relation to things as they exist ; or else the Christian faith, as preached by latter-day instructors, has practically given up the older principles and substituted for them something else in the nature of a compromise. Historically, of course, the second is what has actually occurred. Many of the early Christian doctrines were primarily addressed to the proletariat, and have a decidedly socialistic ring about them. When Christianity became a world-wide religion its sharper edges were blunted ; its socialistic and communistic enactments were forgotten or submerged in something much more vague and practical. The religion of a minority, especially a minority in acute opposition, is very different from the religion of a majority which has gained its triumph and converted the world. That, no doubt, is what has happened to the simple tenets of the Sermon on the Mount. They do not suit a modern age, they do not accommodate themselves to the mundane circumstances of a new Babylon. When the rich become Christians, when the passionate devotion of a few enthusiasts is altered into the mild, equable tolerance and common sense of men of the world, then Christianity

alters its character. But with what justice fashionable men and women of to-day, the millionaires, the politicians, the ecclesiastics, think that they are basing themselves and their lives on the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount I, for one, find it difficult to see. Personally, I think clergymen have been wise in their generation, and though they may or may not have retained the harmlessness of doves, they have certainly managed to secure some of the sagacity of serpents. They do not trouble their congregation with what may possibly happen to them in another world, nor are they ill-bred enough to tell their rich supporters how difficult it is for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. For the masculine portion of their congregations, which, I am told, is unfortunately of small dimensions, they preach a sort of philosophic rationalism. For the benefit of the feminine members, who are, I understand, the great majority, they give a highly-ornamental ritual and appeal exclusively to the æsthetic sense. If this is Christianity, then let me at once admit that they who do and preach such things are Christians and believers.

OXONIENSIS.

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